The Courtier, the Anchorite, the Devil and his Angel: Gerald of Wales and the Creation of a Useable Past in the *De Rebus a se Gestis*

Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By

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2010

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Abstract

The twelfth-century littérature, courtier, and cleric Gerald of Wales (d. 1223) is an invaluable, if controversial, source for historians of Wales, Ireland, and the Plantagenet monarchy. Because Gerald was descended from both the Cambro-Norman castellans and the native Welsh princes of his half-conquered homeland, his voluminous writings – especially the *Itinerarium Kambriae* and *Descripção Kambriae* – have been scoured by scholars interested in issues of identity and ethnicity. Literary scholars, particularly Monika Otter and David Rollo, have detected in his early works a dense, intra-referential text supportive of multiple, even subversive, interpretations.

Less studied has been the *De Rebus a se Gestis* (c. 1208-1216); this most “autobiographical” of the three accounts Gerald wrote detailing his struggle to obtain metropolitan status for the see of St. David’s (1199-1203) survives in only one, incomplete, copy. The *De Rebus a se Gestis* has been under-valued and misunderstood; it is not, as one historian has described it, a mere “chronological” account of the St. David’s controversy. A close study of the text, especially when contrasted with other Geraldine sources such as the *Symbolum Electorum*, reveals an audacious revisionist project undertaken by Gerald to create for himself a useable past. In the *De Rebus a se Gestis*, Gerald downplayed his decade as a Plantagenet courtier and reinvented himself as a Welsh firebrand.
The key to this project of self-reinvention is Gerald’s pious-sounding account of his visit to Wechelen, the anchorite of Llowes. At one level, which I have termed “exoteric,” the “Wechelen story” valorizes Gerald’s ignominious departure from the Plantagenet court (c. 1194) by subsuming his failure beneath a conventional narrative of religious resignation. At another level, which I have termed “esoteric,” Wechelen’s strange tale of a plot undertaken by “the Devil” and a “woman disguised as a nun,” a plot intended both to defame the anchorite and destroy Welsh souls, itself serves to conceal Gerald’s vehement refutation of a rumor that he had, in 1198, encouraged a sanguinary English attack on Welsh rebels besieging Painscastle.

The De Rebus a se Gestis lacks a dedicatory preface. Nowhere in the secondary literature has anyone suggested an intended readership for the work. However, textual evidence suggests that Gerald composed it for a native Welsh reader. Furthermore, during the years he is thought to have written the work, 1208-1216, Gerald’s personal circumstances had become straitened; he needed a literary patron, but his usual sources of patronage among the Plantagenet elite had become unavailable. These difficult personal circumstances, considered in the context of both the internal evidence of the work and the surviving record of Gerald’s political activities in Wales years earlier, during the St. David’s controversy, suggest that Gerald composed the De Rebus a se Gestis to win for himself the patronage of Llywelyn ab Iorwerth of Gwynedd (1173-1240), the pre-eminent prince of the native Welsh.
Dedication

Dedicated to Dr. Joseph H. Lynch (1943-2008), beloved teacher.

Requiem aeternam dona ei, Domine, et lux perpetua luceat ei.
Acknowledgments

I sincerely thank Professor Barbara Hanawalt, for graciously accepting me as her advisee, for her wise counsel, and for her encouragement; Professor Richard Firth Green and Professor Daniel Hobbins for their generosity in serving on my dissertation committee; Professor Nathan Rosenstein, for frequent, generous contributions of his time over many years.

I am grateful to Joby Abernathy for her help.

For their helpful advice and counsel, I sincerely thank my fellow graduate students and scholars, especially: Dr. David Defries, Dr. Wendy Matlock, Jim Bennett, Dr. Kathleen Kennedy, Dr. Matthew Akers, Elisabeth Akers, and Dr. Kevin Slack.

Both deep gratitude and filial piety compel me to acknowledge that without the devoted help and encouragement of my parents, William and Alice Batchelder, this dissertation would have been impossible.

I am encouraged in every endeavor by my wife, Dr. Xela Batchelder, and my daughter, Miss Eilidh Batchelder.

_All things come of thee, O Lord, and of thine own have we given thee._
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<td><em>Gerald of Wales, 1146-1223</em>, (Oxford: The Oxford University Press, 1982)</td>
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<td><em>A History of Wales from the Norman Invasion to the Edwardian Conquest</em> (New York: Barnes and Noble, 2004)</td>
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Introduction

In his home diocese of St. David’s, Gerald de Barri (c. 1143- c.1223), known to history as Giraldus Cambrensis or Gerald of Wales, held the archdeaconry of Brecon, an ecclesiastical office of some responsibility. Gerald was a man of great intellectual attainment who had, over the course of two extended residencies in Paris, studied the trivium, quadrivium, theology, and law. While he often complained that his mixed lineage compromised him politically, in point of fact his descent from Cambro-Norman castellans and native Welsh princes brought him certain advantages. His marcher kinsmen gave Gerald access to the Plantagenet court, while his kinship to the Lord Rhys of Deheubarth made him a useful servant to two kings of England. And yet in the *De Rebus a se Gestis*, Gerald claimed that after a decade at the Plantagenet court he realized that his years of royal service had been in vain and that he detested the life of a courtier.

To consummate his withdrawal from court and his renunciation of worldly ambition, Gerald made a dramatic visit to Wechelen, the anchorite of Llowes. Wechelen, “a good and holy man,” was endowed with charismatic gifts. He spoke Latin miraculously, and the sick came to his window hoping to be healed. Indeed, Wechelen’s conspicuous holiness had attracted the attention of the Devil. In August of 1198, when an English army had been assembled just over the Wye river at Hay, the Devil conspired to use Wechelen’s considerable moral authority against him. To this end, he sent a
“woman disguised as a nun” to the English army bearing a false message. She told the credulous English that she had been sent by Wechelen and that the holy anchorite had promised them a certain victory if only they would attack forthwith the Welsh army besieging nearby Painscastle. The English did indeed attack and the battle proved to be a disaster for the Welsh. Gerald claimed that after this terrible slaughter, Wechelen had lamented to him that some Welshmen, under the mistaken impression that the anchorite had indeed been behind the devastating English attack, murmured against him.

During his conference with Wechelen, Gerald told his anchoritic friend that he intended to embark upon a life of study. He begged the spiritual athlete to pray for him so that he might progress in knowing and understanding the scriptures. Wechelen listened to Gerald’s pious-sounding request - and then firmly rebuked him. Reaching out through the little window of his cell, Wechelen grabbed Gerald’s arm and told his archdeacon that he ought to desire to keep the scriptures, not just to know them. Upon the anchorite’s rebuke, Gerald wept penitent tears. Having received of the anchorite both blessing and rebuke, Gerald departed for Lincoln to study theology.

Gerald placed this picturesque encounter with Wechelen at a dramatic juncture in the narrative of the De Rebus a se Gestis: at the end of his curial career but several years before his crusade for the rights of the see of St. David’s and the independence of the Welsh church from Canterbury. The Wechelen story has been accepted by historians as a realistic illustration not only of Gerald’s character, but of eremitism in Wales and the informal attainment of Latin learning by solitaries. Unfortunately, the Wechelen story is a complete fiction. Gerald may have retired from the curial court in 1194, but he never renounced worldly ambition, never removed himself from ecclesiastical controversy, and
never withdrew from Welsh politics. He most assuredly did not visit Wechelen the anchorite, because Wechelen the anchorite did not exist.

The so-called “Autobiography of Gerald of Wales,” or the *De Rebus a se Gestis*, has been misunderstood and underappreciated; the key to understanding the entire work is the story of Gerald’s visit to Wechelen. The best evidence for my reinterpretation of the *De Rebus a se Gestis* comes from evidence internal to that document and from a comparison of what Gerald wrote about himself in the *De Rebus* with what he wrote elsewhere in his many literary productions. Before I can undertake my revision of the *De Rebus a se Gestis*, then, I must first review the most important details of Gerald’s biography and provide an overview of his substantial literary production. Having situated the *De Rebus* among Gerald’s three compositions concerned with the St. David’s controversy, I will then introduce both the *De Rebus a se Gestis* and the Wechelen story in some detail. After a review of historical reception of both works, I will offer a brief chapter-by-chapter overview of the argument of this work.

**Gerald of Wales: A Biographical Overview**

It is no simple matter to interpret the writings, or indeed the career, of Gerald of Wales. Gerald had a mixed ethnic background, part “Cambro-Norman” and part native Welsh. Over the course of his life he was both a reforming cleric and a curial bureaucrat; he was always an intellectual and a man of letters. Sometime around 1147, Gerald de Barri was born behind the walls of Manorbier castle in Pembrokeshire, Wales. In this half-conquered Celtic outpost at the northwestern edge of a great empire, Gerald’s father,
William de Barri (born c. 1100), served the Plantagenet monarch as a castellan. Gerald claimed that his earliest memory was of an attack on the castle; he tearfully requested to be taken for safety into the sanctuary of a nearby chapel rather than remaining behind the castle walls. Gerald liked to describe his family as men of great importance in southwest Wales; he boasted castellans and other military men of modest responsibilities among his cousins. His uncle, David (d. 1176), was bishop of St. David’s. The de Barri family did not truly come into prominence until the late 1160’s, however, when they found their fortune not in Wales, but in Ireland. In 1167, a band of Gerald’s kinsmen were recruited by Dermot MacMurrough (1110–71) to help him recover the Irish kingdom of Leinster. In the aftermath of their astonishing success, many of Gerald’s kinsmen became landholders of some importance in the newly-conquered regions of Ireland.

Aggressive warrior families such as Gerald’s had served along the violent Welsh frontier of the Plantagenet empire long enough to develop a self-identification distinct not only from the native Welsh, but also from magnates in England and on the Continent. Many members of this local “Cambro-Norman” or “marcher” elite intermarried with native Welsh princely families. Such was the case with the de Barri family. Historians often identify Gerald’s marcher clan as the “Geraldines.” The name is taken not from the cleric and author, but from his grandfather and namesake, Gerald of Windsor (died c. 1136). Gerald was a castellan in the service of King Henry I. Sometime around 1100, he married Nesta (died c. 1136), the daughter of Rhys ap Tewdwr, Prince of Deheubarth. This daughter of the indigenous Welsh aristocracy was renowned for her beauty; she had been a mistress of Henry I before the king married her off to his castellan. In 1106 Nesta earned the sobriquet “the Helen of Wales,” when Owain ap Cadwgan (d. 1116), a son of
the princely house of Powys, abducted her from Cenarth Bychan. Owain’s rash action provoked one conflagration between the marchers and their native Welsh adversaries and then another among the native Welsh aristocracy of Powys.¹

Throughout his life Gerald identified closely with the marcher society of Wales; Robert Bartlett has called Gerald the “spokesman for the Marchers... their eulogist and apologist.”² Indeed, Gerald’s writings often reflect the disdain of the colonizer for the colonized.³ And yet, if Gerald often wrote disparagingly of the culture and mores of the native Welsh, he was pleased enough to be related, through his grandmother Nesta, to their princes. The most important of these relationships was with his first cousin once removed, Rhys ap Gruffydd (1132-97), prince of Deheubarth. For most of his adult life, “the Lord Rhys” was the most powerful of the native Welsh princes. Deheubarth, in southwest Wales, enjoyed supremacy over the other two substantial principalities of the native Welsh (Powys, in east central Wales, and Gwynedd, in the north). Together with his elite education and the de Barri family’s service to the Plantagenet crown, the kin ties Gerald enjoyed with the great men among the native Welsh allowed Gerald access to the court of Henry II and led to his decade of curial service (1184- c.1194).

The many public roles Gerald played over the course of his long life complicate his biography at least as much as his mixed heritage. To posterity, he is remembered first as a prolific author. Were a scholar to collect every citation of Gerald in the historical

¹ Lloyd, pp. 45-47.
² Bartlett, pp. 20-25.
³ Bartlett, pp. 16-17; 158-177.
literature, I suspect she would find that he is most often quoted in the context of his service to the Plantagenet kings as a curial clerk. To his contemporaries, however, Gerald was first of all a cleric: *Magister Giraldus*. In the *De Rebus a se Gestis*, Gerald claimed that he had been marked out early in life for a church career.\(^4\) While Gerald was still a little boy, his father called him “my bishop;” his uncle, the bishop of St David’s, oversaw Gerald’s education.\(^5\) It was an elite education. Gerald began his studies at the local cathedral school, continued them at St. Peter’s Abbey, Gloucester, and completed them over the course of two extended periods of study in Paris (c.1165-72; 1176-79).\(^6\) Gerald claimed that he had not only mastered literary studies in Paris, but that he had also learned enough civil and canon law to offer lectures.\(^7\)

Because of his failure to obtain any bishopric and most especially because of the agonizing failure of his nearly five-year crusade (1199-1203) to be made archbishop of St David’s, Gerald’s career in the church is often characterized as a disappointment. It is worth remembering that, compared with the vast majority of twelfth-century churchmen, Gerald’s career was an outstanding success. Much of this success came early; Gerald rose to the position of archdeacon with great celerity and he was taken seriously as a candidate for the episcopacy while still in his thirties. Upon his return from his first period of study at Paris around 1173, Gerald managed to convince Richard of Dover (d.

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\(^4\) *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I*, pp. 21-22.

\(^5\) *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I*, pp. 22-23; *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera IV*, p. 107.

\(^6\) Bartlett, p. 292.

\(^7\) *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I*, pp. 45-46.
1184), the archbishop of Canterbury and a papal legate, to depute to him some of his legatine authority. Armed with this authority, Gerald returned to Wales to impose upon his home country the ideals of reformers in Paris and Rome. He harried local communities which had neglected their tithes, while rooting out what he saw as corruption among the clergy of St. David’s. Gerald’s reform efforts brought him into conflict with an older cleric, Jordan, the archdeacon of Brecon. Gerald demanded that Jordan put away his concubine. When Jordan refused to do this, Gerald brought the abuse to the attention of both the bishop (his uncle David) and the archbishop of Canterbury. According to Gerald, the archbishop told David to depose Jordan and make Gerald archdeacon of Brecon in his place.

Although Gerald claimed he was offered many episcopal sees over the course of his curial career, and although he was in fact made elect of St David’s twice, he never progressed in the church hierarchy beyond the rank of archdeacon. Gerald served a poor see in a rural archdeaconry - though his circumstances did not exactly match the genteel poverty and obscurity he described as his lot in the *Itinerarium Kambriae*. In fact, if Gerald’s rank within the church remained frustratingly static, his fortune grew a good deal before the St. David’s controversy began in 1199. Gerald held multiple benefices encompassing a good deal of property in Wales. Some time in the early to

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8 *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I*, p. 24.

9 *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I*, p. 27.

10 *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I*, p. 87.

mid-1190’s, his literary prowess earned him an English prebend at Hereford from Bishop William de Vere (d. 1198).\(^{12}\) In the same decade, Gerald added at least one further holding at Chesterton in the diocese of Lincoln.\(^{13}\)

Sometime in 1184, the archdeacon of Brecon was called to court by King Henry II.\(^{14}\) In the *De Rebus a se Gestis*, Gerald is both vague and unrelentingly negative about his ten years as a curial clerk.\(^{15}\) After his retirement from court, Gerald attributed his failure to obtain the rewards he desired to his Welsh blood.\(^{16}\) In fact, without his family connections to the loyal (but ambitious) Geraldines on the one side and to the Lord Rhys and other native Welsh princes on the other, Gerald would never would have been called to court in the first place. While Gerald did travel to the Continent in Henry’s entourage at least once, his primary responsibility was to see to the implementation of the king’s Welsh policy. In 1171, after a series of miscalculations in Wales including costly punitive expeditions, Henry II had settled upon a policy of co-opting the Lord Rhys of


\(^{13}\) At Chesterton. *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I*, pp. 259-268.

\(^{14}\) Gerald wrote that he had been called to court while Henry II “was then in the March busy over the pacification of Wales.” (Butler, p. 57). Robert Bartlett arrived at 1184 by comparing this statement to the Itinerary of Henry II. Bartlett, p. 58 n. 1.

\(^{15}\) Gerald describes his years of curial service in the *De Rebus* in Book II, chapters vii-xxiv.

\(^{16}\) This is a constant refrain with Gerald. Robert Bartlett thought that he expressed it most dramatically in one of the prefaces to the *De Principis Instructione*. Bartlett, pp. 17-19, *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera VIII*, pp. lvii-lxvii. Gerald claimed that his Welsh blood disadvantaged him in the *De Rebus a se Gestis* as well. *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I*, pp. 57; 60.
Deheubarth. Busy with his rebellious children and his vast continental possessions, the king counted on this most eminent and powerful of the native Welsh princes to keep the peace in native Wales and along the march. Furthermore, because Gerald’s marcher kinsmen constituted a substantial number of the adventurers who had conquered much of Ireland between 1169 and 1171, King Henry II attached Gerald to John’s entourage during his ill-fated 1185 attempt to make his youngest son “Lord of Ireland.”

Upon the July 1189 death of Henry II at Le Mans, Gerald claimed he was dispatched immediately to the march of Wales and that his errand “pacified” his homeland. His efforts accomplished no such thing, but the death of Henry did mark a new phase in Gerald’s career. Despite having dramatically and publicly taken the cross at Radnor in March of 1188, Gerald did not accompany Richard I on the third crusade; instead, Gerald had himself and his bishop, Peter de Leia, dispensed on the grounds of poverty and old age respectively. While Richard I was away on crusade (and in captivity in the Empire), Gerald served the regency government of England. He went on at least three embassies to the court of the Lord Rhys between 1192 and 1193. By late 1193 or 1194, however, Gerald’s career as a courtier came to a disappointing end. He claimed that he had been ruined by a member of his entourage, a gyrovague Cistercian abbot named William Wibert. According to Gerald, Wibert slandered him before the

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18 Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I, p. 61.
19 Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I, p. 84.
20 Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I, pp. 84-85.
21 Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I, p. 204.
great men of the regency government in England, telling them that Gerald had taken the
time opportunity of his embassies to Wales to intrigue with his native Welsh cousins against
the interests of the Crown. After Gerald’s c. 1194 withdrawal from the court, he
continued to receive payments from the exchequer until “midway through 1201-02.”

The archdeacon of Brecon had probably expected an English bishopric as a
reward for his service to the crown, however neither Henry II nor Richard I promoted
Gerald. During the reign of King John, Hubert Walter (c. 1160-1205), archbishop of
Canterbury and the most powerful curial bureaucrat in England, successfully blocked
Gerald’s election to the much smaller and poorer see of St. David’s. While Gerald’s
curial service lasted only a decade, he remained bitter for the rest of his life about both
the setbacks he encountered at court and what he perceived to be his ongoing persecution
by courtiers. In spring or early summer of 1196, Gerald moved to Lincoln, where he
claimed to have retreated into a life of study. In the De Rebus a se Gestis, Gerald
explained that he had chosen Lincoln for his retreat both because the renewal of conflict
between Richard and King Philip II of France made travel to Paris impossible and
because he wanted to study theology with William de Monte (d. 1213), a disciple of Peter
the Chanter who had been made chancellor of Lincoln by St. Hugh in 1194. In 1198,
Bishop Peter de Leia, the regular cleric who had been imposed upon the chapter of St.

22 Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I, pp. 204-205.

23 Gerald received 5d. a day from 1194. Bartlett, p. 19 n. 39.

24 De Invect., pp. 193-195. See also Richter, Giraldus Cambrensis p. 87; Bartlett, pp.
47-48.

25 Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I, pp. 93-94.
David’s by Henry II and whom Gerald thoroughly despised, died. Gerald claimed, in the *De Rebus a se Gestis*, that only the pleading letters his home chapter sent to him at Lincoln during the episcopal vacancy that followed caused him to abandon his theological studies and return to public life.\(^{26}\) In 1199, in defiance of Hubert Walter, the archbishop of Canterbury and trusted servant of two English kings, the chapter of St. David’s elected Gerald bishop.\(^{27}\)

This election inaugurated both the greatest adventure and the most severe disappointment of Gerald’s life. Historians typically refer to the four and one-half year legal struggle Gerald conducted in defense of his election both at Rome and before judges-delegate in England as the “St. David’s case” or the “St. David’s controversy.” While Gerald consistently identified with the marcher aristocracy of Wales before his 1199 election to the see of St. David’s, Gerald reinvented himself for the duration of the controversy (and intermittently in his literary productions for years afterwards), as a champion of the native Welsh. To be fair, Gerald was dogged indeed in his defense of his own election and in his pursuit of what he believed to be the rights of the Welsh church.

In 1199, the chapter of St. David’s appealed to Rome against the archbishop of Canterbury’s interference in their free election of the archdeacon of Brecon. Gerald was sent to argue his case before the Pope Innocent III (r. 1198-1216) and to receive from the pope the consecration Hubert Walter refused him. The bishop-elect of St. David’s seized

\(^{26}\) *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I*, pp. 108; 112.

\(^{27}\) *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I*, p. 111.
upon the opportunity presented by his own contested election to try to convince the pope that St. David’s ought to be “restored” to metropolitan status independent of Canterbury.\(^{28}\) At the climax of his first and most dramatic address before Pope Innocent, Gerald denounced Hubert Walter for using the ban of excommunication against the native Welsh in connivance with Plantagenet political oppression and demanded that the pope give to the Welsh bishops who spoke their language and understood their customs.\(^{29}\) The rulers of all three of the major native Welsh principalities, Gwynedd, Powys, and Deheubarth, signed a petition to the pope echoing these demands.\(^{30}\) While these princes could offer Gerald only modest aid, they were the only public figures who stood by him until the end.

For almost five years, in the face of increasing isolation and hardship, Gerald doggedly pursued his case. From 1199-1203, he made the arduous journey to Rome three times. When he tried to pawn his books to fund his cause, a Welsh monastery stole the entire library outright.\(^{31}\) A year after they had elected Gerald, the chapter of St. David’s abandoned him and muddied the waters by electing his former friend, Peter abbot of Whitland.\(^{32}\) By 1201, King John declared him an enemy of the realm.\(^{33}\) Friends refused

\(^{28}\) For a careful treatment of Gerald’s “historical” argument, which he made sincerely, but which by modern historical standards is probably spurious, see Richter, *Giraldus Cambrensis*, pp. 113-115.

\(^{29}\) *De Invect.*, pp. 85-93.

\(^{30}\) *De Invect.*, p. 149; *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera III*, pp. 244-246.

\(^{31}\) *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera IV*, pp. 155-6.

\(^{32}\) *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera III*, pp. 198-199.
him shelter; Gerald had to sneak out of England to pursue his final appeal. On his last trip home from Rome, he was captured and thrown into a Burgundian dungeon. By December of 1203, Hubert Walter had worn the archdeacon of Brecon down. Gerald had few supporters left and saw no point in going on. In exchange for certain considerations, Gerald agreed both to stop appealing to Rome against the election of the archbishop’s candidate for the see of St. David’s and, at least for the remainder of Hubert Walter’s lifetime, to abandon his advocacy of the metropolitan claims of St. David’s. The candidate the archbishop imposed upon St. David’s, Geoffrey de Henlaw (d. 1214), was three times an insult to Gerald – he was a foreigner, a regular cleric, and an intimate of Hubert Walter.

After Gerald withdrew from the St. David’s controversy, he retreated to his kinsmen in Ireland. From c. 1204-06, he stayed with his cousin Meiler fitz Henry (d. 1220), justiciar of Ireland from 1199-1208. In 1206, he made a final pilgrimage to Rome. After Meiler was removed as justiciar of Ireland in 1208, Gerald seems to have fallen on hard times. His nephew, also called Gerald, reneged on an agreement the two men had made in which the young Gerald assumed the archdeaconate of Brecon but his uncle retained much of the revenue. Gerald’s other opportunities, both fiscal and

33 Richter, *Giraldus Cambrensis* pp. 118-119.

34 *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera III* pp. 223-4; 227-8; 236-239.


36 *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera III* pp. 322-326.

37 *Spec. Duo.*, lxvii.

38 *Spec. Duo.*, xxix.
political, had become severely circumscribed. After all that had transpired in the St. David’s case, he could hardly resume curial service. Further compounding Gerald’s troubles was the papal interdict of 1208-1213; the interdict forced England’s prelacy into exile, and in so doing removed a prime source of patronage to the Continent. Gerald seems to have spent his last years in Lincoln; he died c. 1223. While he does not seem to have participated in public life between 1208 and his death, Gerald did complete all three of his St. David’s works during this period, as well as two other major works and multiple revisions of older literary productions.

Gerald of Wales: Literary Productions

Gerald was a prolific author and his literary work seems to have been at least as important to him as his public career. Indeed, amidst the shifting loyalties of his varying public career, Gerald’s perpetual quest for a wealthy and powerful patron may have been the only constant. In an attempt to attract favor, promotion, and patronage Gerald often prefaced his compositions with elaborate dedications to some of the most important men of his day, including: Kings Henry II, Richard I, and John, justiciar William Longchamp, bishop Hubert Walter, and two archbishops of Canterbury, Baldwin and Stephen Langton. Gerald wrote a great deal and a great deal of what he wrote has come down to us (more or less) intact. Even a portion of Gerald’s university juvenilia, a cosmological poem, survives.\textsuperscript{39} Gerald also drew maps, though none of these survive.\textsuperscript{40} Most of his

\textsuperscript{39} The \textit{Cosmographia}. A study of the tides he wrote at university, the \textit{De Philosophicis Flosculis}, does not survive. Bartlett, pp. 220-221.

\textsuperscript{40} Bartlett, p. 221.
writings were edited in the nineteenth century by three different editors in eight volumes for the Rolls Series. Since the Rolls Series editions were completed a work once considered lost – the Speculum Duorum – has been published in a critical edition. An expanded and improved, if not critical, edition of the De Invectionibus has also been published.

Generally speaking, Gerald’s literary output can be divided into five categories: Welsh and Irish works; works connected to or informed by his curial service to the Plantagenets; personal correspondence; religious works; and his three separate treatments of the St David’s controversy. I will review these last separately, as the object of this study, the De Rebus a se Gestis, is one of the St. David’s works. Because my interpretation of the De Rebus draws extensively upon evidence from Gerald’s other literary endeavors, it is necessary to review each of these literary productions briefly for content and chronology. For the following review of Gerald’s corpus, I have drawn largely upon the scholarship of Michael Richter and upon the appendix Robert Bartlett included with his monograph, Gerald of Wales.

Gerald’s Irish and Welsh works were his earliest and his most widely read. Gerald served in John’s entourage in Ireland in 1185; after John left, he stayed behind until spring of 1186. Gerald began the Topographia Hibernica, or Topography of Ireland

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42 Bartlett, Appendix I, pp. 212-221.
at that time.\textsuperscript{43} He recited the first recension at Oxford sometime between 1187 and 1188.\textsuperscript{44} Next, Gerald composed his \textit{Expugnatio Hibernica}, or \textit{Conquest of Ireland}.\textsuperscript{45} The work was completed in the summer of 1189.\textsuperscript{46} The \textit{Expugnatio} exalts Gerald’s family and pours scorn upon both the native Irish and the Plantagenet administrators who attempted, at the direction of Henry II, to diminish the independence of Ireland’s Cambro-Norman conquerors.

Gerald’s Welsh works were composed immediately thereafter. Gerald drew upon his experience in the entourage of Baldwin, archbishop of Canterbury, over the course of an 1188 preaching tour of Wales to compose the \textit{Itinerarium Kambriae}, or \textit{Journey through Wales}.\textsuperscript{47} Baldwin, who died outside the walls of Acre only two years later, had undertaken the tour to recruit soldiers for the Third Crusade. The first recension of the

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\textsuperscript{44} There seem to have been four recensions in total. Bartlett, p, 213. Gerald described the Recitation in the \textit{De Rebus a se Gestis}. \textit{Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I}, pp. 72-3.


\textsuperscript{46} A. B. Scott and F. X. Martin, p. xvi.

\end{flushright}
*Itinerarium Kambriae* was completed in 1191; there were two more c. 1197 and c. 1214.\textsuperscript{48} The *Description of Wales*, or *Descripicio Kambriae*, followed.\textsuperscript{49} He completed the *Descripicio* c. 1194, and a second recension c. 1215.\textsuperscript{50} In the *Itinerarium Kambriae*, Gerald glorified his role as the expedition’s shrewd guide and most eloquent preacher while imparting priceless observations on the material culture, mores, and history of the native Welsh. The *Descripicio Kambriae* expands upon these observations, both natural and ethnological. Robert Bartlett has characterized the Welsh and Irish works as “a curious mixture of geography, topography, and ethnography, of history and natural history, of anecdote, fable and moralization.”\textsuperscript{51} Not only are these Irish and Welsh works the best known of Gerald’s writings today, they were also the most popular among Gerald’s contemporaries - they were widely copied and survive in multiple manuscripts.\textsuperscript{52} The same cannot be said for any of his other works, most of which survive in a very few copies or only one.\textsuperscript{53}

Gerald’s years in the curiae of Henry II and Richard I are evident in two other compositions. The *Vita Galfridi Archiepiscopi Eboracensis*, or *Life of Geoffrey*

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{48} Bartlett, p. 216.
\item \textsuperscript{50} Bartlett, pp. 216-217.
\item \textsuperscript{51} Bartlett, p. 133.
\item \textsuperscript{52} Bartlett, pp. 213-217.
\item \textsuperscript{53} Richter, *Giraldus Cambrensis* p. 125.
\end{itemize}
Archbishop of York, was the fruitless product of a bad gamble for patronage. The work, likely written c. 1193, is an extremely partisan account of the many trials and tribulations of the impossible Geoffrey Plantagenet (d. 1212). By the end of his farcical ecclesiastical career, this pugnacious bastard of Henry II had managed to alienate the chapter of York, the royal court, and the pope himself. Gerald very likely made enemies of truly powerful and important men by his partisan treatment of several of Geoffrey’s numerous and interminable quarrels. Gerald’s extreme bitterness toward Henry II in particular prompted him to compose his vitriolic denunciation of Plantagenet tyranny, the Instruction of a Prince, De Principis Instructione. This was a work of decades, which Gerald began in the 1190’s but did not complete until about 1217.

Gerald composed or compiled two works largely concerned with personal matters. The earliest, the Symbolum Electorum, is Gerald’s collection of his favorite passages from his poems and his Irish works along with a large selection of personal correspondence. David Rollo characterized the Symbolum Electorum as Gerald’s


55 Bartlett, p. 217.

56 Richter, Giraldus Cambrensis pp. 89.


58 Bartlett, p. 219.

“authorized florilegium” and found it characteristic of Gerald’s supreme literary self-confidence. 60 Some of the letters included in the Symbolum Electorum shed important light on why Gerald’s curial career came to an end and what his activities were in the mid to late-1190’s. Robert Bartlett dated the Symbolum Electorum to c. 1199. 61 Gerald’s other largely personal work, the Speculum Duorum, was composed in his later years. 62 This bitter denunciation of two men, his ungrateful nephew, Gerald fitz Philip, and the young man’s scheming tutor William de Capella, was not published in a critical edition until 1974. The work does not show Gerald at his best, but his ad hominem against these two men provides valuable insights into Gerald’s domestic and financial arrangements as well as his personal views.

Gerald’s religious works can be divided into two longer compositions and five shorter hagiographical works. Each of Gerald’s hagiographical works has a direct

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61 Because the only full version which survives includes all four prefaces to the De Principis Instructione, a work Gerald did not complete until very late in life, Michael Richter assigned the work a much later date. Bartlett has dated the surviving, complete manuscript of the De Principis Instructione to c. 1217, but has argued that there is no reason to believe that the material included in the Symbolum Electorum was written that late. Gerald labored over the De Principis Instructione for decades and the rest of the material Gerald compiled in the Symbolum Electorum pre-dated the St. David’s controversy (1199-1203). I favor Bartlett’s date; it makes sense that Gerald, in preparation for his legal fight for the see of St. David’s, would have compiled selections from his works that portrayed him in a favorable light. See Bartlett, p. 219; Richter, Giraldus Cambrensis and the Growth of the Welsh Nation, p. 91.

relationship to the place where the author lived when he wrote it. He composed two lives of saints important to his home diocese. His *Vita Sancti Davidis*, a biography of his cathedral’s patron saint, was written in the 1190’s and survives in one manuscript.\(^{63}\) Gerald’s *Vita Sancti Karadoci*, a biography of a hermit saint who lived in the diocese of St David’s in the early twelfth century, does not survive; however, the version of the *Life of St Caradoc* in the *Nova Legenda Anglie* may have been derived from it.\(^{64}\) Gerald composed a life of St. Ethelbert, the *Vita Sancti Ethelberti*.\(^{65}\) This work was likely the fruit of his friendship with William de Vere, bishop of Hereford; Hereford boasted a shrine to St. Ethelbert.\(^{66}\) Gerald’s periods of study at Lincoln cathedral, one from 1196-1199 and the other from the second decade of the thirteenth century until the end of his life, resulted in two hagiographic works. The *Vita Sancti Remigii* grew into a history of the see.\(^{67}\) Around 1213, Gerald wrote the first biography of Lincoln’s saintly Carthusian bishop, Hugh of Avalon, a man he had known personally.\(^{68}\)


\(^{64}\) Bartlett, p. 217.


\(^{66}\) Julia Barrow, 185.


In addition to his hagiographical works, Gerald wrote two substantial religious treatises. The first was the *Gemma Ecclesiastica* or *Jewel of the Church*. Gerald wrote this work of instruction for his Welsh clergy in the archdeaconry of Brecon. The *Gemma* was composed at Lincoln sometime after 1196; it must have been completed by 1199, as Gerald presented a copy to Pope Innocent III during his first audience before the pontiff. The *Gemma* owes an immense debt to the moral theology of Peter the Chanter (d. 1197), under whom Gerald may have studied; entire chapters of the *Gemma* are lifted wholesale from the Chanter’s *Verbum abbreviatum*. The *Gemma* also borrows extensively from other theological works and from both individual saints’ lives and collections such as the *Vitae Patrum*. Gerald’s last religious treatise is also his most infamous work: the *Mirror of the Church*, or *Speculum Ecclesie*. The prologue of the only surviving copy is badly mutilated; R. W Hunt reconstructed the prologue and dated the work to some time after November of 1219. Richard Kay subsequently argued that

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70 *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I*, p. 119.

71 *Gemma*, xxi-xxii; See also Eva M. Sanford, “Giraldus Cambrensis’ Debt to Petrus Cantor” *Medievalia et Humanistica Fasciculus III* April, 1945 pp. 16-20; 30-32


73 Hunt dated the work after 1215 because of a reference to the completed Lateran IV conference in Book IV, and based upon a reference to the bull “Super Speculum,” issued
Gerald composed the *Speculum Ecclesiae* in the hope of having some influence upon the deliberations of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215).\(^7^4\) Kay believed that Gerald assembled a collection of scandalous anecdotes he had collected into an argument for church reform, dedicated the work to Stephen Langton, and presented Langton with a copy just weeks before the prelate left England to attend the council.

The most important event of Gerald’s life was the St David’s controversy. After he failed both to secure his election and to obtain metropolitan status for his see, Gerald composed three works defending the justice of both causes. Gerald began the *De Invectionibus* at Rome in 1200 during a particularly heated episode in the St David’s controversy; it was not finished until around 1216.\(^7^5\) The work is largely a compilation in six books of documents relating to the case, from Gerald’s orations before the pope to a collection of visionary and prophetic material concerning the see of St. David’s and her bishop-elect. The *De Rebus a se Gestis* was begun second but completed first; according

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\(^7^4\) Kay believed that the post-1214 material that led Hunt to date the work to sometime after 1219 was inserted by Gerald into a later recension. Richard Kay, “Gerald of Wales and the Fourth Lateran Council” *Viator*, vol 29, 1998 pp. 79-94.

\(^7^5\) Bartlett, p. 219. *Spec. Duo.*, xx-xxi. Richter believes that Book V of the *De Invectionibus* refers to Pope Innocent in language “which strongly suggests the pope was already dead.” Innocent died in 1216. The *Rolls Series* edition of the *De Invectionibus* was split between volumes I and III. An improved, if not critical edition, of the entire work was published in 1920: Giraldus Cambrensis, *De Invectionibus*, ed. W. S. Davies, *Y Cymmrodor*, XXX, 1920.
to Robert Bartlett this occurred sometime between 1208 and 1216.\textsuperscript{76} The sixth book of the \textit{De Invectionibus} was copied from the \textit{De Rebus}.\textsuperscript{77} The \textit{De Rebus} is a combination of narrative history and document collection. Gerald’s last St David’s work, c. 1218, was the \textit{De iure et Statu Menevensis Ecclesiae} or \textit{Laws and Statutes of St. David’s}.\textsuperscript{78} Gerald dedicated the \textit{De iure} to Archbishop Stephen Langton; indeed, in the introduction to the work he appealed to Langton to reform St. David’s.\textsuperscript{79} This work combines Gerald’s narrative of the St. David’s controversy with documents illustrating the same. Because Gerald intended the \textit{De iure} for a renowned Paris schoolman, he at times employed a scholastic and dialogic \textit{Quarens/Solvens} format to explain aspects of the case.

\textbf{The De Rebus a se Gestis}

It is my contention that historians have neither adequately appreciated nor sufficiently understood the \textit{De Rebus a se Gestis}. That this has been the case, however, is entirely understandable. The \textit{De Rebus a se Gestis} has come down to us incomplete; indeed, the bulk of what is arguably the most important section of the work, Book III, is

\textsuperscript{76} Bartlett, p. 219. The \textit{De Rebus} cannot have been begun before 1208, as Gerald wrote of visiting his cousin Meiler in Ireland, “tunc regni justiciarum…” (\textit{Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I}, p. 112). Meiler was removed from the justiciarship of Ireland by John in 1208.

\textsuperscript{77} “De Invect. Chapters 3-24 correspond to De Rebus chapters 218-38.” \textit{Spec. Duo.}, xx n. 21; \textit{De Invect.}, p. 204.


\textsuperscript{79} \textit{Giraldi Cambrensis Opera III}, pp. 113-115.
missing. Furthermore, the narrative mode Gerald adopted to tell his story distances the author from the text rather than granting the intimacy we might expect in an “autobiographical” work. Finally, the strange preface of the *De Rebus* offers no help in determining Gerald’s intended readership. This makes contextualizing the work challenging.

The only surviving copy of the *De Rebus a se Gestis*, a thirteenth-century manuscript now located in the British Library, is not only incomplete, but ends abruptly only a few chapters into Book III, the most important of the three sections.\(^8^0\) Book I and Book II, which taken together are nowhere near as long as Book III was, survive with only a very few lacunae. Book I recalls “Giraldus’s birth and the deeds of his boyhood and youth.”\(^8^1\) In eleven chapters, Gerald described his birth, his early enthusiasm for the church, his education, and how he came to be archdeacon of Brecon. Book II records “the deeds of his manhood’s prime.”\(^8^2\) In twenty-four books, Gerald described his second period of study in Paris (1179-1184); his entry into the royal service (1184); his conversation with the Lord Rhys of Deheubarth; his journey to Ireland in John’s entourage (1185); his journey through Wales in archbishop Baldwin’s preaching party (1188); and the many bishoprics he declined from the hands of princes.

\(^8^0\) London, British Library, MS Cotton, Tib. B. xiii.

\(^8^1\) “De ortu Giraldi, pueritiae gestis et adolescentiae” *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I*, p. 21.

\(^8^2\) “De Gestis virilis, aetatis et robustae” *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I*, p. 45.
Book III, “concerning the deeds of his later and riper years,” begins with Gerald’s renunciation of the court and his visit to Wechelen, the anchorite of Llowes. Gerald then described his retreat into theological study at Lincoln and how his retreat was brought to an end by the canons of St. David’s, who, when their see fell vacant in 1198, first implored Gerald’s aid and then elected him their new bishop. Gerald transcribed into four chapters his increasingly acrimonious correspondence with Hubert Walter, the archbishop of Canterbury. This acrimony culminated, after Gerald’s election to the see of St. David’s, in the archbishop’s refusal to consecrate the new bishop-elect. The only extant copy of the De Rebus a se Gestis comes to an abrupt end just as Gerald arrived at Rome, where he went both to appeal against the archbishop of Canterbury in the matter of his own election and to argue on behalf of the metropolitan pretensions of the see of St. David’s.

The bulk of Book III of the De Rebus a se Gestis is lost. Because the list of chapter headings survives for the entire work, it is possible to ascertain that 218 chapters of Book III are missing; almost all of this missing material was concerned either directly or indirectly with the St. David’s controversy. This means that the only surviving

83 ‘De Gestis provectoris aetatis et maturae” Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I, p. 89.

84 There is a slight mismatch between the list of chapter headings and the surviving chapters of the De Rebus, itself. In the text of the De Rebus a se Gestis, Book III chapter xi and Book III chapter xii share a common heading, “Qualiter rege Ricardo defuncto, per litteras comitis Johannis Giraldus est vocatus.” In chapter xi, Gerald described the circumstances under which the letters arrived and in chapter xii he transcribed the letter itself. The list of chapter headings seems to have been drawn up with the understanding that all of this material would have been included in Book III chapter xi. As a result, in the text the last surviving chapter of the De Rebus, “Litere archiepiscopi contra archidiaconum missae” is numbered Book III chapter xix, whereas according to the
manuscript of the *De Rebus* comes to an abrupt end just as Gerald’s narrative account of the most important struggle of his life was beginning. In the last extant chapters of the *De Rebus*, Gerald described his arrival at Rome, his presentation of books to Pope Innocent III, and the pope’s invitation to hear and respond to a brutal letter of invective against himself sent to Rome by Hubert Walter. Gerald included the letter of invective as chapter xix of Book III; in it, the archbishop attacked Gerald’s character and the legality of his election. Gerald’s stirring response, which I believe to have been the rhetorical apogee of the intact *De Rebus a se Gestis*, is the first chapter missing in the only surviving copy. Fortunately, this oration survives in the *De Invectionibus*.\(^{85}\) Indeed the surviving chapter headings of *the De Rebus a se Gestis* indicate that much of the material missing from the *De Rebus* survives in the *De Invectionibus* and the *De Iure et Statu Menevensis*. However, it is impossible to know from chapter headings alone if similar-sounding material in the other two St. David’s works is abridged or complete.\(^{86}\)

Not only is the *De Rebus a se Gestis* incomplete, the narrative mode Gerald adopted to tell his own story is strange. That Gerald wrote the *De Rebus a se Gestis* is beyond dispute. He borrowed extensively from the *De Rebus* for Book VI of the *De Invectionibus*.\(^{87}\) Furthermore, in the *De Iure et Statu Menevensis Ecclesie*, Gerald

\(\text{\footnotesize 85} \) *De Invect.*, pp. 85-93.

\(\text{\footnotesize 86} \) *Spec. Duo.*, p. xx.

\(\text{\footnotesize 87} \) *Spec. Duo.*, p. xx.
referred the reader to the *De Rebus*. Gerald also acknowledged the *De Rebus* in two lists he made of his own works and in his *Retractiones*, a brief set of retractions and corrections he composed late in life. Nevertheless, for a work Gerald wrote about his own life, his choice of narrative mode in the *De Rebus* suggests an unusual distance between author and subject. Gerald adopted the third person narrative mode for the entire work, save only a few places. For those events which occurred chronologically prior to his having been made an archdeacon, Gerald referred to himself as “Gerald,” *Giraldus*. After Book I chapter iv, Gerald referred to himself as “the Archdeacon,” *Archidiaconus*.

What is more remarkable, however, is that Gerald constructed this narrative voice in such a way as to suggest that the *De Rebus* was not written by himself, but by some anonymous follower. That is to say, Gerald did not simply adopt the third person narrative mode for reasons of formality or modesty, but rather the third-person voice he adopted for the *De Rebus* strongly implies that the work was written by someone else entirely. In the Preface, for example, Gerald wrote: “I have taken upon me to set forth in scholarly fashion, yet simply and without elaboration, the famous deeds of a man of our

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88 He directed the reader to “De Gestis Giraldi.” *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera III*, p. 225.

89 In all three works he referred to the *De Rebus a se Gestis* as the “de Gestis Giraldi.” The *Catalogus Brevior Librorum Suorum*, *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I*, p. 423; the *Epistola ad Capitulum Herefordense de Libris se Scriptis*, *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I*, p. 415; the *Retractiones*, *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I*, p. 426.

90 For example, “qui tunc longe remoti fuimus” *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I*, p. 83.
own time, which I either witnessed with my own eyes or took down from his own lips.”

In Book II chapter xxi, Gerald introduced the story of his perilous trip from the Continent to Wales in summer of 1188 as though the narrator of the *De Rebus* was relating the story second-hand: “Wherefore I have thought it not beside the mark to insert a thing which the Archdeacon was wont to relate when talking of divers mischances that befell him.”

Gerald described the advice he had received from his brother on the eve of the St. David’s controversy in a similar way: “Wherefore the Archdeacon was wont to testify that these same words of a good man, though a layman and unlettered, proceeding from his great wisdom and love, had given him great consolation in the many afflictions, grievous and great, which he endured in this struggle.”

It is highly unlikely that Gerald made this choice of narrative mode lightly. The literary scholars David Rollo and Monika Otter have made much of Gerald’s authorial self-consciousness and his awareness of the textuality inherent in historical writing.

Stephen G. Nichols detected this authorial self-consciousness in Gerald’s discrete uses of the first and third person voices in the *Itinerarium Kambriae*:

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91 Butler, 33; “…viri cuiusdam nostri temporis inclite gesta, quae vel oculis conspexi vel ipso referente notavi…” *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I*, p. 19.

92 Butler, p. 112 “Unde et quiddam, quod archidiaconus, quando de variis casibus et fortuitis eventibus suis loquebatur, referre consueverat, hic interserere praeter rem non putavi.” *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I*, p. 81.

93 In Book III, chapter xvi of the *De Rebus*, pp. 161-162; “Magnum itaque solutum ex verbis istis viri boni, laici prorsus et illiterati, ex dilectione pariter et discretione magna provenientibus, suis crebris quas graves et grandes in hoc agone sustinuit, [afflictionibus] archidiaconus se proculdubio suscepisse testari solebat.” *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I*, p. 116.
Much of the text uses a third-person, self-representation of Gerald at moments when he appears as master trope… an embodiment of the rhetoric and wisdom linking the Christian metanarrative to history. The division into a subjective and objective persona multiplies the voices and speaking modes Gerald can assume within the work; they run the gamut from minor anecdote to his manipulation of the form of Itinerarium itself.\footnote{Stephen G. Nichols, “Fission and Fusion: Mediations of Power in Medieval History and Literature” \textit{Yale French Studies}, No. 70 (1986) pp. 31.}

Gerald did indeed make creative use of the first and third person in the \textit{Itinerarium Kambriae}. However, in the dedications affixed to both recensions and in the first two chapters of Book I, Gerald clearly identified himself as the author of that work.\footnote{In Book I chapter i, Gerald identified himself as the first to take the Cross at Radnor with the words, “qui scripsit haec.” In chapter ii, Gerald described the visit of the chaplain of Brecon castle “ad loci illius archidiaconum apud Landu qui scripsit haec…” Gerald was, of course, the archdeacon of Brecon and the author of the work. \textit{Giraldi Cambrensis Opera VI}, pp. 14; 21.} Gerald made no such explicit self-identification anywhere in the \textit{De Rebus a se Gestis}.

Finally, in contrast to most of his literary productions, it is not at all clear who Gerald hoped would read the \textit{De Rebus a se Gestis}. It lacks a dedicatory preface; that is to say, no potential or actual patron is invoked. Furthermore, while Gerald wrote many works that lack a dedicatory preface but were obviously intended for particular cathedral chapters, it is not at all obvious that he intended the \textit{De Rebus} for the chapter of St. David’s. True, in the unusual prologue Gerald affixed to the \textit{De Rebus}, he expressed a hope that someone in the future would again take up the cause of St. David’s:

\begin{quote}
And though from these documents it may be impossible to discover any remedy for what is past and gone, yet something of no small profit may be learned therefrom, namely, caution against evils yet to come, And as Giraldus built exceeding well on the foundations laid by Bernard, so too (if hereafter an honest man should ever arise in the Church of Mynyw and find good faith among his
\end{quote}
brethren) may he, for the exaltation of his own Church and for the glory of all Cambria, so strive that he also in his own day may build upon that which Giraldus built before him…  

Nevertheless, evidence from the other St. David’s works suggests that, in the missing chapters of the De Rebus, Gerald’s depiction of his fellow canons was unflinchingly negative. Furthermore, there is bountiful evidence suggesting that, by the time the St. David’s controversy grounded to a halt in 1203, every last bridge between Gerald and his old chapter had been burned.

Indeed, aside from the invocation of some future champion of St. David’s, the prologue Gerald affixed to the De Rebus sounds more epic than ecclesiastical:

It was a custom of the ancient Greeks to commend the deeds of famous men to the memory of after-generations in such a manner as might cause them to be the better and the more clearly remembered. And this they did, firstly by portraits and secondly by writing, to the end that posterity might be inspired to the laudable imitation of the great virtues of days gone by. For no man is kindled to imitation by hearing or reading the fabulous records of deeds that are extravagant or impossible, But when a man’s true virtue flashes forth, then the virtuous mind is uplifted to imitate many deeds and to take them to heart. Wherefore I have taken upon me to set forth in scholarly fashion, yet simply and without elaboration, the famous deeds of a man of our own time, which I either witnessed with my own eyes or took down from his own lips.

Butler, pp. 33-34. “Quanquam ex his instrumentis elici nequeat de praeterito medela, contrahi tamen per haec eadem poterit, quod non mediocriter expedit, de futuro cautela. Et sicut super fundamentum a Bernardo positum egregie Giraldus aedificavit, sic super hanc Giraldi struem si quis unquam in Menevensi ecclesia de caetero probus emerserit et fidem in fratribus invenire valuerit, ad ecclesiae suae dignitatem et Kambriae totius honorem, suis et ipse diebus aedificare ac strenue dicare contendat…” Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I, pp. 19-20.

Butler, p. 33; Inclitorum gesta virorum quondam Grai veteres primo per imagines deinde per scripta tenacios et expressius memoriae commendabant; quatinus exactis temporis virtutum extantium aemula posteritas posset imitatione laudabili ad similia provocari. Fabulosis enim seu relationibus seu lectionibus, quibus hyperbolica promuntur et impossibilitia, ad imitationem nullus ascenditur. Sed ubi vera viri virtus
The De Rebus a se Gestis: The Wechelen Story

Gerald’s account of his renunciation of the life of the courtier and his visit to Wechelen, the anchorite of Llowes is consistent with the heroic tone of the Prologue; it is also the key to my reinterpretation of the De Rebus a se Gestis. Throughout this dissertation I will refer to Book III chapter ii of the De Rebus as “the Wechelen story.”

Gerald placed the Wechelen story at a dramatic point in his narrative. Book Two ends with Gerald declining the see of Llandaff from John, then Earl of Pembroke, and recalling all the bishoprics he claimed to have refused: “Therefore besides the Church of St. David, to which he had been nominated and especially called in his youth, four Bishoprics had now been offered him, two in Ireland and two in Wales, yet all of these offers he trod underfoot with lofty and untroubled mind, since he coveted no such thing.” To this nolo episcopari Gerald joined a claim that his true concern had always been scholarship:

For then he wished to have no more than he already had, since it would hinder his studies, which he pursued with almost ceaseless assiduity. For it had been a marvel that, even when he followed the Court, he none the less wrote histories, and after long and laborious journeys, such as are the lot of courtiers, would keep

emicat, ibi ad imitandum et virilia complexandum mens virtuosa consurgit. Unde viri ciusdam nostri temporis inclite gesta, quae vel oculis conspexi vel ipso referente notavi, scolastico stilo, simplici tamen et non exquisito…” Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I, p. 19.

98 Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I, pp. 89-93. “Wecheleu” in Latin has been rendered both “Wechelen” and “Wecheleu” in English. Following H. E. Butler, the translator of the De Rebus a se Gestis, I have preferred “Wechelen.” For the significance of the name “Wechelen/Wecheleu” please see Chapter Three, pp. 162-171.

99 Butler 121-122.
vigil till dawn, working by candlelight and joining night to day, as though he were in the schools and set on naught save study… Wherefore his chief desire was this and this alone – to complete his studies and, above all, to perfect his knowledge of theology in the schools…

The first chapter of Book Three follows immediately thereafter, with a stirring renunciation of the life of the courtier:

Now Giraldus, considering that his following of the Court was utterly in vain, vain too all promises, vain all promotions offered him, vain and unworthy of himself and his deserts, withdrew himself wholly from the turmoil of the Court as from a stormy sea, a course which he had long since conceived in his mind and now gradually begun to follow; and with salutary wisdom he resolved to transfer himself to the schools as to a calm and tranquil haven.

In this first chapter of Book III, Gerald joined to his particular renunciations of episcopal promotion and curial advancement a grand renunciation of worldly ambition. Gerald placed the Wechelen story in the second chapter of Book III so that this great renunciation could be made in the presence of a holy man who had himself renounced the world for enclosure in an anchorite’s cell. What follows is the second chapter of the third book of the De Rebus a se Gestis - the Wechelen story - in its entirety. For ease of interpretation, I have taken the liberty of breaking the chapter into four parts:

I. And so, with this resolution firmly fixed, he approached his friend named Wechelen, a good and holy man, the anchorite of Llowes at Elfael (in his own archdeaconry, not far from the Wye river), with the intention of attaining his permission and also his blessing. When, among other things,
he begged him sedulously that he might pray for him to profitably know and understand the sacred scripture (to which he desired to give himself over), the holy man, grasping and squeezing the archdeacon’s hand in his, responded: “Och! Och! Do not desire to know but to keep! Vain, vain it is to know unless to keep!”

II. Indeed such was his way of speaking – always in the infinitive without observing the cases – and yet, he was able to be understood well enough. Such knowledge, therefore, was all the more admirable from a simple and unlettered man, that it is vain knowing and not keeping, and indeed perilous, because he who knowingly and intentionally sins, sins seriously. To whom more is given, from him more – rightly – is required. For the better anyone knows, the worse he sins; and where the gift of knowledge is greater, there the transgressor is subject to the greater fault. Hence Isaiah: “How long will you see and not keep?” Such an idea, therefore, is not from man, but from God, of whose spirit he was, in fact, full. The archdeacon, much chastised and brought to tears upon hearing this, then begged him sedulously that he might pray that he would have the strength not only to know but especially to keep the Divine Scripture with the utmost effort. The archdeacon inquired how he got his Latin, since he had not studied. He responded in this way. (I have put down his very own words just as the archdeacon was accustomed to, willingly and frequently, recollect and recite them). “I,” he said, “go to Jerusalem and visit the sepulcher of my Lord, and, when I return, I put me in this prison for the love of my Lord who die for me. And I grieve much, because not able to understand Latin nor the Mass nor the Gospel; and many times cry and beg the Lord to give to me to understand Latin. At last, however, one day at the hour of eating to call through the window to my servant once and again and many times and he not come. I sleep because of weariness – and also hunger – and when I wake, I see my bread lie on the altar. And -

103 In hoc itaque proposito firmiter constitutus ad amicum suum anchoritam de Locheis apud Elevein in archidiaconatu suo non procul a Vagae fluvio, cui nomen Wecheleu virum bonum et sanctum, licentiam ac benedictionem suam accepturus accessit. Quem cum inter caetera rogaret attentius, ut oraret pro ipso, quatinus Sacram Scripturam, cui indulgere volebat, scire salubriter et intelligere posset; respondit vir sanctus, manum archidiaconi manu sua tenens et stringens: “Och och noli dicere scire sed custodire: vana vana est scire nisi custodire.” Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I, pp. 89-90.
approaching to bless the bread and to eat - straightaway at vespers I understand verses and Latin words which the priest say, and similarly at Mass in the morning, as it seemed to me. And after Mass I call the priest to the window with the missal, and ask him to read the Gospel for the day. And he read, and I expound – and correctly, the priest say – and afterward I speak with the priest in Latin, and he to me. And from that day I speak thus; and my Lord, who gave to me the Latin tongue, did not give it to me grammatically or with the cases, but such that I can be understood and understand others.” It was the same with Ezra the prophet, who wrote of himself: “The Lord said to me, Open your mouth; and I opened my mouth; and behold – a vessel full of water, the color of which was like fire. And when I drank, the heart set forth my understanding; and wisdom entered into my breast.”

104 Talis enim erat ei loquendi modus semper per infinitivum nec casus servabat; tamen satis intelligi poterat. Quare magis admirandum unde viro simplici et idiotae scientia talis, quod vana sit scientia non custodienti, quinetiam et periculosa; quia qui sciens et prudens peccat, graviter peccat. Cui nimirum plus committitur merito et ab ipso plus exiguitur. Quo enim quisque melius sapit, eo deterius delinquit; et ubi majus donum scientiae, ibi transgressor majori subjecet culpae. Unde Ysaias: “Qui vides multa non custodies?” Non igitur ab homine est sententia talis sive scientia, sed a Deo, cuius revera spiritu plenus erat. Archidiaconus autem hoc audito correctus plurimum et ad lacrimas commotus supplicavit ei tunc attentius, ut oraret, quatinus Sacram Scripturam divinam non solum scire sed etiam summopere custodire valeret. Requirenti vero archidiacono unde ei verba Latina, cum non didicerit, respondit in hunc modum. Sua enim ipsius verba ponam; sicut ea libenter archidiaconus et frequentuer retractare et recitare consuerat: “Ego,” inquit, “ire Hierosolimam et visitare sepulchrum Domini mei, et quando redire, ego ponere me in hoc carcere pro amore Domini mei qui mori pro me. Et multum ego dolere, quod non posse intellegere Latinum neque missam nec evangelium; et multotiens flere et rogare Dominum dare mihi Latinum intelligere. Tandem vero cum uno die hora comedendi vocare ad fenestram serventem meum semel et iterum et pluries, et non venire; propter taedium simul et famem ego dormire et quando vigilare, ego videre super altare meum panem jacere. Et accedens benedicere panem et comedere; et statim ad vesperas ego intelligere versus et verba Latina quae dicere sacerdos, et mane similibiter ad missam sicut mihi videbatur. Et post missam ego vocare presbyterum ad fenestram cum missali, et rogare ipsum legero evangelium illius diei. Et ipse legere et ego exponere; et dicere sacerdos quod recte; et postea loqui cum presbytero Latinum, et ipse mecum. Et ab illo die ego sic loqui; et Dominus meus, qui dedit mihi Latinam linguam, non dedit eam mihi per grammaticam aut per casus, sed tantum ut
III. Now it happened that the Welsh besieged Painscastle in Elfael (built a short time before). And when a multitude of the English army had been assembled at Hay and thereabouts, a certain woman disguised as a nun came to them - as though she had been sent by the aforementioned anchorite – advising them and counseling them on his part so that they would join the Welsh in battle without fear, promising them certain victory. And because they had faith in him as a holy man, it was done, and in one day around three thousand of the Welsh fell. When word had spread throughout the entire province, the archdeacon came to visit his friend the anchorite, (which he would do most gladly when opportunity permitted), who at once, among other things, reported to him concerning this talk. And he was greatly pained that such talk should be spread around concerning himself; swearing, furthermore, that he had never given any such instruction to the English or even knew about it. Indeed he said, just as he ought, that he would prefer to advise against rather than to advocate such combat between Christians, from which the shedding of blood would arise. He said that the Devil, on account of the perdition of many which he foresaw as a consequence and the great profit in souls that would come to him out of this conflict, procured that such a message should come to the English as though from him whom they considered trustworthy; and the angel of Satan - in order that she might defame him as the author and instigator of the slaughter - transformed herself, as if into an angel of light.\footnote{Contigit autem Walenses castellum Pagani in Elevein paulo ante constructum obsedisse; et cum multitudo Anglicani exercitus apud Haiam et circa partes illas collecta fuisset venit ad eos mulier quaedam quasi sub specie monialis et tanquam ab anachorita praedicto transmissa, monens illos ex parte ipsius et consulens, quatinus cum Walensibus secure congredereantur, certam eis victoriam promittendo. \textit{Et quoniam fides habebatur ei tanquam viro sancto, ita factum est; et ecciderunt uno die de Walensibus circiter tria millia. Cum autem divulgatum esset verbum istud per totam provinciam illam, venit archidiaconus amicum suum anachoritam visitare; quod libertissime nacta opportunitate faciebat; qui statim inter caetera retulit ei de verbo illo. Et quia multum dolebat tale verbum de ipso disseminatum fuisse; jurans etiam se nunquam tale quid Anglicis intelligi possem et alios intelligere.” Tale fuit et illud Esdrae prophetae, qui de se sic scribit: “Dixit Dominus mihi. Aperi os tuum; et aperui os meum; et ecce calix plenus aqua, cujus color similis igni. Et cum bibissem, eructavit cor meum intellectum; et in pectus meum introivit sapientia.” \textit{Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I}, pp. 90-91.}
IV. Now he loved the archdeacon most tenderly, to such a degree that he related (in secret) his visions and revelations made to him from heaven, and when he was away and far off, desiring (out of a feeling of great love) to share all things with him, he sent them written down on a roll. And so the holiness and beatitude of the man, beloved and chosen by God, had been revealed by many signs and mighty works in his life and many more, from heaven, after his death. Nevertheless, he had once sought counsel from the archdeacon, whether or not he ought – as certain monks of the Cistercian order had advised him - to push away the lame and the blind and those afflicted by various illnesses coming to him in order that he might, through the window, lay hands on them and cure them. He received the answer that he ought not to suppress the grace of healing given to him by God, but rather he ought to share it with those begging and needing it. However, he ought to take the greatest care that no pride or arrogance ooze into him as a consequence. Furthermore, the archdeacon recalled to his mind that gospel example of the disciples returning to Jesus and bragging, saying that the demons were subject to them; Jesus, to humble their pride responded: “Do not be glad that the spirits are subject to you, but rather be glad that your names have been written in heaven.” But enough of the holy man, from whom I depart with difficulty, just as the archdeacon himself, when speaking of him, departed from this matter reluctantly. Now, however, I return to the matter at hand.\textsuperscript{106}

\textsuperscript{106} Diligebat autem archidiaconum tenerime; adeo ut visiones suas et revelationes sibi divinitus factas et secreto proponeret, et cum absens atque remotus esset, grandi dilectionis affectu cuncta vo ens ei communicare scriptas in rotulis destinaret. Multis itaque signis et virtutibus in vita sua multoque pluribus post obitum ipsius fuerat divinitus viri Deo dilecti et electi sanctitas atque felicitas declarata. Quaesiverat autem aliquando ab archidiacono consilium; utrum claudos et caecos variisque languoribus afflictos ad ipsum venientes, ut manus per fenestram eis imponeret et curaret, a se repelleret; sicut
It is beyond the scope of this investigation to review the many historical interpretations of Gerald’s personal character or his merits as a writer, historian, cleric, or ethnographer. My review of the secondary literature will be restricted to those works most immediately relevant to my own investigation of the De Rebus a se Gestis. While I believe that the De Rebus a se Gestis has been misunderstood and even neglected, the same cannot be said for its author; three scholars in particular have devoted serious attention to Gerald: H. E. Butler, Michael Richter, and Robert Bartlett. The fact that I disagree, to some extent, with all three concerning the De Rebus does not diminish the importance of their scholarship nor its usefulness to my own inquiry. I also owe an indirect debt to the work of two literary scholars, Monika Otter and David Rollo.

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monachi quidam Cisterciensis ordinis ei suaserant, necne? Qui responsum accepit; quod gratiam curationum sibi a Deo datam non supprimeret, sed petentibus et indigentibus eam caritativae potius impartiret. Veruntamen ne quid inde sibi superbiae surreperet aut arrogantiae summopere caveret. Illud etiam evangelicum ad mentem ei revocavit exemplum de discipulis revertentibus ad Jesum et gloriantibus dicendo, quod et daemonia eis fuerant subjecta; quibus ad arrogantiam deprimendam respondit Jesus: “Nolite gaudere quod spiritus vobis subjiciuntur; sed potius gaudete quod nomina vestra scripta sunt in coelis. Sed haec hactenus de viro sancto, a quo difficile discedimus, sicut et archidiaconus ipse de eo loquendo vix ab ea materia discedebat. Nunc autem ad rem revertamur. Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I, pp. 91-92.

To the extent that the *De Rebus* is known at all to non-specialists, it is due to the efforts of H. E. Butler, a professor of Latin at University College, London. In 1937, Butler translated the *De Rebus a se Gestis* and supplemented his translation with passages from seven of Gerald’s other works to create *The Autobiography of Gerald of Wales*. While the *De Rebus* is lost after only nineteen chapters of the third book, the surviving list of chapter headings indicates that much of the missing material can be found in the other two St. David’s works. Butler attempted to recreate much of the missing 219 chapters by supplementing his translation of the *De Rebus* with excerpts from the *De Iure et Statu Menevensis Ecclesie* and the *De Invectionibus*. He also supplemented his translation of the *De Rebus* by inserting autobiographical material from the *Expugnatio Hiberniae*, the *Itinerarium Kambriae*, the *Symbolum Electorum*, and the *Speculum Ecclesie* - all clearly introduced and distinguished from the text of the *De Rebus* – into the body of his translation/compilation. By his efforts, Butler created an invaluable

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108 I have normally preferred H. E. Butler’s eloquent translation to my own ineloquent translations. In the rare instance I have disagreed with Butler’s translation, I have made my own. In all cases, I have included the Latin, or a citation for the Latin, in a footnote.


110 The drawback to Butler’s approach is that such a homogenization of these works creates a distorting consistency – making it seem as though the *De Invectionibus* or the *De Iure et Statu Menevensis Ecclesie* were written for the same readers as the *De Rebus a se Gestis* or maintained exactly the same perspective as did the *De Rebus*. Indeed the very title Butler chose for his compilation, *The Autobiography of Gerald of Wales*, implies that Gerald set out, in the *De Rebus*, to create a work which fulfills the modern expectation of authorial self-disclosure.
English language introduction both to Gerald and to the St. David’s controversy. I have made frequent recourse to his eloquent and scholarly translation in this dissertation.\textsuperscript{111}

Butler accepted Gerald’s presentation of events in the \emph{De Rebus a se Gestis} largely at face value, writing that between the \emph{De Rebus a se Gestis} and the \emph{De Iure et Statu Menevensis Ecclesiae}, Gerald “… bequeathed us a treasure unique for medieval England – a full autobiography of his long eccentric and adventurous life.”\textsuperscript{112} While admitting that an autobiography “… can never tell the full story of any man’s life; it can never be impartial,” Butler reckoned Gerald’s “self-revelation” to have been “frank” and concluded “… there is little reason to suppose that it falls markedly below the level of autobiographical veracity.”

Michael Richter has probably published more on Gerald of Wales than any other historian.\textsuperscript{113} In 1972, he published the authoritative monograph on the St. David’s controversy: \textit{Giraldus Cambrensis: The Growth of the Welsh Nation}.\textsuperscript{114} Richter collaborated, in 1974, with Yves Lefèvre, R.B.C. Huygens and Brian Dawson on an edition and facing-page translation of Gerald’s \textit{Speculum Duorum}. In his socio-linguistic

\textsuperscript{111} Indeed, Robert Bartlett thought well enough of Butler’s translation of the \emph{De Rebus} to cite it in his study of Gerald. Bartlett, p. 47.

\textsuperscript{112} Butler, 22.


publications, Richter has cited the Wechelen story in some detail.\textsuperscript{115} Richter has consistently defined the St David’s works – the \textit{De Rebus a se Gestis}, \textit{De Invectionibus}, and \textit{De Iure et Statu Menevensis Ecclesie} - in relation to one other, according to the function of each. In 1972, he wrote:

\ldots the \textit{De Invectionibus}\ldots is a collection of documents of his suit… of commentaries and reflections, and the fullest source-book for his dispute which exists. Of a different nature is… the \textit{De Iure et Statu Menevensis Ecclesiae}. The available material there had been transformed into a fictitious discussion between two people who argue all aspects of the dispute but in fact eulogize Giraldus all the time. It is the commentary of Giraldus on his suit, and of lesser value as far as historical documentation is concerned, but a good psychological study of the author. Finally, the greatest part of Giraldus’ autobiographical work, the \textit{De Rebus a se Gestis}, is devoted to this time. The dispute stands so much in the foreground of the work, covering the whole of the (now lost) Book Three… that it is not quite correct to call the work an autobiography; the chapters on his youth are short and basically uninformative, and the years after 1203… are left out altogether. If one would classify the three books, they could justly be called the chronological (\textit{De Rebus}), systematic (\textit{De Invectionibus}) and psychological (\textit{De Iure}) treatment of his election dispute."\textsuperscript{116}

In a 1973 article in \textit{Traditio}, while continuing to define the \textit{De Rebus} by its relationship to the other two St. David’s work, Richter made the barest acknowledgement that the \textit{De Rebus} preserved something more than simply a “chronology” of events:

In recollecting his past life, so recently after his fight for St. David’s, his permanent attachment to Wales may have appeared to him stronger than it had actually been. Of this work only the first two books are preserved. They had been designed as an introduction to the controversy of St. David’s, so their autobiographical parts must be seen in these lights. They show a strong attachment to Wales and pass very lightly over Gerald’s years in the English royal household.\textsuperscript{117}

\textsuperscript{115} Please see Chapter 2, pp. 117-118; Chapter 3, pp. 184-190.


\textsuperscript{117} Richter, “Gerald of Wales: A Reassessment Written on the 750\textsuperscript{th} Anniversary of his Death” \textit{Traditio} XXIX (1973), p. 388.
In 1974, Richter again characterized the *De Invectionibus, the De Rebus a se Gestis*, and the *De Iure et Statu Menevensis Ecclesiae* as a “trilogy on Giraldus’ fight for St David’s,” and distinguished between them according to the function of each:

The *De Rebus* gives the chronological account, the *De Invectionibus* digests it systematically, and the *De Iure* departs from the source-book method altogether and gives instead a discussion, based on the available material, of the respective rights and wrongs in the St David’s election and the twin issue of the archbishopric for Wales.\(^{118}\)

In his 1982 monograph *Gerald of Wales*, Robert Bartlett investigated Gerald primarily as an intellectual of the twelfth-century renaissance.\(^{119}\) He did not neglect Gerald’s biography, nor did he overlook the political circumstances in which Gerald lived and wrote.\(^{120}\) However, while Bartlett treated Gerald’s political loyalties at some length within the context of his curial and ecclesiastical career, his study concerns Gerald the intellectual, or the “naturalist,” “ethnographer,” and “ecclesiastic.” For this reason, Bartlett concentrated on Gerald’s Welsh and Irish works and on a poem of his student days, the *Cosmographia*. Even Bartlett’s close reading of Gerald’s most political work, the *De Principis Instructione*, concentrates primarily on Gerald’s philosophical ideas. Nevertheless, Bartlett’s characterization of the *De Rebus* as “teleological” is perceptive:

> In his autobiography… Gerald presented a picture of his career in which his election to St David’s in 1199 formed a natural culmination. According to this

\(^{118}\) *Spec. Duo.*, xxi.


\(^{120}\) For example, Bartlett’s classification of Gerald as “a spokesman for the Cambro-Norman marcher lords,” rather than a “Welsh patriot” should put permanently to rest anachronistic “patriotic” interpretations of Gerald’s loyalties. Bartlett, pp. 20-25.
account it was his manifest destiny to become the champion of St David’s, and his activities throughout his life were consistent with this role… This teleological autobiography had its culmination in his election to St. David’s, when the canons urged him to go to the Pope for consecration “so that by his laudable efforts in Rome he might vindicate the metropolitan rights of his church, fulfilling the unique and special hopes which they had conceived concerning him since his early youth.”

Neither Monika Otter nor David Rollo has investigated the *De Rebus a se Gestis*. However, their approaches to the Geraldine texts are not entirely dissimilar to mine. In essence both believe, as do I, that in some places Gerald’s writings contain more than what can be ascertained from a surface reading. In *Inventiones: Fiction and Referentiality in Twelfth-Century English Historical Writing*, Monika Otter concluded that some twelfth-century Latin writers were very much aware of the “textuality” inherent in historical writing. Authors such as William of Malmesbury (d. 1143), Walter Map (d. 1208), and Gerald, were “…more aware of referential complexities, of the narrative possibilities offered by narrator roles and metaphor, than has been recognized.” Otter assigned particular significance to certain motifs found in twelfth-century Latin historical writing, such as stories of the supernatural rediscovery of lost relics. She refused to dismiss these motifs as evidence of the credulity of the authors; nor did she believe that

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121 Bartlett, p. 46.


123 Otter, p. 160.
they compromised the works’ relationship to literal historical events. Similarly, Otter refused to confine her interpretation of these motifs to traditional allegory:

My argument… pushes against (although it does not deny) two kinds of referential backing for the historical narrative: simple, literal reference, in which “facts” in the text are assumed to correspond directly to “facts” in outside reality, and allegorical reference, in which the narrative is seen as reproducing or “clothing” a higher truth. A third mode of referring arises naturally from the writerly practices of the more sophisticated historians and in many texts comes to predominate over the first two. In the same shorthand in which I labeled the first two modes “literal” and “allegorical” I will call this third mode “metaphoric.”

According to Otter, this third, or “horizontal” mode, “…as a self-consciously artistic structure, can be proposed as the main vehicle of meaning, and readers can be invited to decode the narrative itself, not an allegorical level behind or above the text.”

In *Glamorous Sorcery: Magic and Literacy in the High Middle Ages*, David Rollo argued that the literary sophistication of a small elite of clerics far exceeded that of their patrons. Kings, magnates, and great princes of the church could very often read Latin, but “grammatical competence does not presuppose a skill in applied hermeneutics, a discipline that required years of study to master and remained the esoteric domain of the clerical minority.” According to Rollo, the gap between the literary education of men such as Gerald of Wales and the functional/administrative literacy of their patrons “could lead to the production of texts that aggressively challenged the interpretative capacities of

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124 Otter did admit that the presence of these motifs in historical works meant the works “flirted with fictionality.” Otter, p. 6.

125 Otter, p. 6.

126 Otter, p. 17-18.

their inscribed patrons, ultimately to yield a message that is the very opposite of flattering. “Rollo believed that Gerald epitomized this phenomenon; that he “exploit[ed] his erudition to create texts that are calculatedly designed to subvert the temporal pretensions of the semiliterate to whom they are dedicated.”

The De Rebus a se Gestis: a Reinterpretation

It is my contention that interpretations of the De Rebus a se Gestis in the existing scholarship are either incorrect or incomplete. I will present the De Rebus a se Gestis as a supremely manipulative work; Gerald undertook it not for the purpose of “self-revelation” but self-reinvention. It must be approached with a hermeneutic of grave suspicion and cannot be interpreted successfully without the reader bearing constantly in mind Gerald’s straitened material and political circumstances at the time he wrote it. Far from being, as Richter would have it, a mere “chronological” record of the events of Gerald’s life, the De Rebus a se Gestis is a highly rhetorical work Gerald designed to systematically revise his entire public career.

The Wechelen story is the key to unlocking the De Rebus a se Gestis. Gerald carefully crafted the story of his visit to the anchorite so that it is susceptible to two readings. I will call “exoteric” the reading Gerald intended for the many whom he hoped would read the De Rebus. In the exoteric reading, the Wechelen story dramatically underscores Gerald’s renunciation of the curial court. By invoking Wechelen’s

128 Rollo, xi.
129 Rollo, xxv.
charismatic authority as a holy anchorite, the story sanctifies Gerald’s retirement into a life of study. Every historian who has treated the Wechelen story has accepted that there was an historical figure named Wechelen who was enclosed at Llowes and that Gerald consulted this anchorite before withdrawing into a life of study. That is to say, the story has heretofore exclusively been interpreted according to the exoteric reading.

I have designated the reading I will offer of the Wechelen story “esoteric” because Gerald crafted it for a very few readers. My reinterpretation of the Wechelen story owes an indirect debt to the work of David Rollo and Monika Otter. While it does not share in the complexity of these literary scholars’ approaches to the Geraldine texts, it does share in their common assumptions that Gerald possessed “extreme authorial self-consciousness” and that there is often more to his writing than what appears on the narrative surface.\textsuperscript{130} The \textit{De Rebus a se Gestis} cannot sustain the horizontal, intra-referential and metaphoric readings that Otter detected in the \textit{Itinerarium Kambriae} because it was not written for such a rarefied literary elite. Indeed, Gerald needed the material he had concealed beneath the Wechelen story to be accessible to those who had, if not the elite literacy, at least the correct political knowledge to successfully interpret it. For this reason, Gerald designed the Wechelen story so that some readers could interpret it in a fashion which Monika Otter, in her “modes of reference,” has classified as “allegorical.” That is to say, each of the characters in the Wechelen story bears a stable, vertical relationship to a historic personage.

\textsuperscript{130} Rollo, p. 122.
Even when used in the narrowest, most technical manner, however, the term “allegory” cannot be divorced from its moralizing associations. Gerald did not concoct the Wechelen story to teach any kind of moral lesson – far from it. Indeed, the story camouflages an exercise in political intrigue. For this reason, I have deliberately avoided using the terms “allegory” and “allegorical.” Instead, I have borrowed terminology from the twentieth century political philosopher Leo Strauss (1899-1973). It is important to stress that I am not really offering a “Straussian” reading of the De Rebus a se Gestis. Rather, I believe that the interpretive binary that Leo Strauss applied to certain philosophical texts is more closely analogous to my own approach to the De Rebus than is any concept of allegory. Strauss believed that apparent contradictions in the writing of some political philosophers, Plato for instance, did not reflect uncertainty or inconsistency in the thinking of that philosopher. Instead, Strauss suggested that such philosophers made deliberate concessions to the received opinion that allowed their particular societies to cohere. Such philosophers must be read very carefully because they wrote for two types of readers. In “A Forgotten Kind of Writing,” Strauss explained his theory:

Philosophy or science… is the attempt to replace opinion about “all things” by knowledge of “all things;” but opinion is the element of society; philosophy or science is therefore the attempt to dissolve the element in which society breathes, and thus it endangers society. Hence philosophy or science must remain the preserve of a small minority, and philosophers or scientists must respect the opinions on which society rests. To respect opinions is something entirely different from accepting them as true. Philosophers or scientists who hold this view about the relation of philosophy or science and society are driven to employ a peculiar manner of writing which would enable them to reveal what they regard as the truth to the few, without endangering the unqualified commitment of the many to the opinions on which society rests. They will distinguish between the true teaching as the esoteric teaching and the socially useful teaching as the exoteric teaching; whereas the exoteric teaching is meant to be easily accessible to
every reader, the esoteric teaching discloses itself only to very careful and well-trained readers after long and concentrated study.\(^{131}\)

While Gerald in no way meets the Straussian criterion for a philosopher, Strauss’s “exoteric/esoteric” binary is a more useful tool for unlocking the Wechelen story than is the concept of allegory. Not only does allegory imply a moral lesson, but the moral lesson in allegory is universal –that is to say, it is accessible to every reader. The esoteric layer of the Wechelen story was carefully designed to keep its quotidian referents inaccessible to most readers. Furthermore, the way that Gerald crafted the exoteric layer of the Wechelen story is not dissimilar to the way, in the Straussian binary, that a prudent philosopher presents his esoteric teaching. Gerald molded Wechelen the anchorite to conform to the conventional religious expectations of most of his readers; indeed, Wechelen closely resembles celebrated contemporary religious solitaries such as Wulfric of Haselbury (d. 1154) and Godric of Finchale (d. 1170). Just as, in the Straussian binary, startling inconsistencies should alert the scholar to the presence of esoteric teaching, the inconsistencies between what Gerald wrote elsewhere in his voluminous writings about ascetical solitaries and what he wrote in the exoteric layer of the Wechelen story should arouse our critical faculty. In the Straussian binary, the esoteric teachings of the philosopher are deliberately inaccessible to all but a very few readers. Similarly, Gerald deliberately designed the esoteric layer of the Wechelen story so that it remained concealed from readers who lacked knowledge of the Welsh language, knowledge of

recent political events in Wales, access to Gerald’s letter collection, and cognizance of a vicious rumor that had been circulating among the native Welsh.

The two layers of the Wechelen story are not perfectly analogous to the Straussian binary, of course. According to Strauss’s theory, the philosopher writes at the esoteric and exoteric level in an attempt to pursue the truth while at the same time making necessary concessions to the opinions of society; this disjunction lies at the root of the “noble lie” of the philosopher. In crafting the Wechelen story, Gerald’s purposes were considerably less noble. In the exoteric layer of the Wechelen story, Gerald made deliberate use of the religious conventions of his contemporaries not only to conceal his esoteric message, but also to obscure his less creditable activities between his resignation from the Plantagenet court c. 1194 and his election to the see of St. David’s in 1199. The esoteric message Gerald concealed under the Wechelen story was self-interested, not philosophic - and it may not have been true.

The esoteric reading of the Wechelen story is more tenable once the credibility of both the De Rebus a se Gestis and the exoteric reading of the Wechelen story are called into question. In Chapter One, I will demonstrate how self-serving and deceptive the De Rebus is where it concerns the critical years between Gerald’s resignation from court (c. 1194) and his election to the see of St. David’s (1199). The narrative Gerald concocted for these years is little more than an exercise in bringing his public career into retrospective conformity with the pro-Welsh positions he took after 1199. Gerald made great rhetorical use of the exoteric layer of the Wechelen story in this revisionist project.

In Chapter Two, I will subject the exoteric layer of the Wechelen story to scrutiny it cannot bear. I will demonstrate the profound gulf between the pious interactions
Gerald claims he enjoyed with Wechelen and what he wrote elsewhere on the subject of ascetical solitaries. More importantly, I will demonstrate that the Wechelen story’s version of the events leading up to the battle at Painscastle in August of 1198 is so utterly incredible that it cannot be accepted as a literal, historical account.

The third and fourth chapter of this study will present the esoteric reading of the Wechelen story. In Chapter Three, I will unveil the true identity of “Wechelen.” In Chapter Four, I will unmask his antagonists: “the Devil,” and “the woman disguised as a nun.” The esoteric reading presented in these chapters is much better supported by the evidence than the exoteric reading that has heretofore been dominant. Furthermore, it begs the question, “For whom did Gerald intend the De Rebus a se Gestis?”

I answer this question in Chapter Five. When considered alongside Gerald’s personal and political circumstances during the years he wrote the De Rebus a se Gestis, the message of the esoteric layer of the Wechelen story suggests that Gerald had a surprising - even daring- choice of patron in mind for this work. The identity of this prospective patron goes a long way toward explaining some of the more curious aspects of the De Rebus a se Gestis.
Chapter 1: The (Mis)representation of the Curial Career of Gerald of Wales in the De Rebus a se Gestis

In the *De Rebus a se Gestis*, Gerald concocted a personal narrative for the years 1184-1199 which is at best selective, and which in many places is deliberately deceptive. In *Giraldus Cambrensis: the Growth of the Welsh Nation*, Michel Richter wrote of the *De Rebus a se Gestis*: “As is often the case with autobiographies … crucial and controversial aspects of the career were glossed over.”¹³² This does not go nearly far enough. In a 1973 article in *Traditio*, Richter wrote: “Mystery surrounds his retirement as a royal clerk. Gerald himself, in an autobiography which he wrote about ten years later, did nothing to shed any light on the matter. On the contrary, he glossed over his connections with the English government altogether as if there were something to hide.”¹³³ Even this only begins to capture the deliberately deceptive character of the *De Rebus a se Gestis* where it concerns Gerald’s curial career, his departure from the Plantagenet court, and his activities in the years immediately preceding his election by the chapter of St. David’s.

In the *De Rebus a se Gestis*, Gerald employed evasion, distortion, omission, and perhaps outright falsehood in the service of a carefully constructed narrative of his own life for the years 1184-1199. It was impossible for Gerald to harmonize his curial service

¹³² Richter, *Giraldus Cambrensis*, p. 87.

¹³³ Richter, “Gerald of Wales, a Reassessment...’ p. 383.
to the Plantagenets with his post-1199 posture as a champion of the native Welsh, so he made every effort to distance himself from this service and to attenuate its importance to his public life. To that end, Gerald offered an implausible explanation of how he was called to the court of Henry II. He gave a wildly distorted account of his curial service, emphasizing - at the expense of years spent pursuing Plantagenet policy in his homeland - mere months of work in Ireland and one Lenten season in the entourage of Archbishop Baldwin. To ennoble his failure at court, Gerald concocted an account of his resignation from curial service which omitted the principal reason for his departure. Finally, in his account of his activities during the years between his departure from court and his 1199 election to the see of St. David’s, Gerald deceives by omission. Far from removing himself from all political and ecclesiastical cares during his period of study at Lincoln, Gerald continued to be involved in political and ecclesiastical squabbling in Wales.

It is important to emphasize that the *De Rebus a se Gestis* narrative of these years was carefully constructed. Gerald did not simply indulge in an older man’s romanticism or get confused about dates; he deliberately interwove chronological obscurity with rhetorical bombast in a way calculated to mislead his readers.\(^{134}\) Furthermore, it is impossible to appreciate the narrative importance of the Wechelen story without

\(^{134}\) To be fair, Gerald *did* have trouble with dates. James F. Dimock, editor of three Rolls Series volumes of Gerald’s works, wrote: “There can be no worse authority than Giraldus wherever a date is concerned; he very seldom condescends to give a date, and when he does it is quite as likely to be wrong as right” *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera V*, p. lxxxiii. Robert Bartlett called Gerald “notoriously unreliable in matters of chronology.” Bartlett, p. 158, n. 1. Dom David Knowles made a similar judgment. David Knowles, “Some Enemies of Gerald of Wales,” *Studia Monastica* 1 (1959), p. 137.
understanding that Gerald’s pious-sounding invention plays *the central role* in this project of deception and revision. Gerald placed this story in a chronologically strategic position in his narrative - just after his departure from court but well before a series of horrific events in Wales that began in 1197. For the purpose of this chapter, I will set aside the esoteric layer of the Wechelen story, and instead concentrate on the many deceptive uses Gerald made of the exoteric layer. Gerald employed the exoteric surface of the story both to valorize his failure at court and to create the misleading impression that he had retreated into a life of study at Lincoln long before he had actually done so. Gerald deployed the dramatic rhetoric of renunciation in the Wechelen story, in combination with material in succeeding chapters, to make it seem as though he had not only removed himself entirely to Lincoln between 1196 and 1199, but also to give the impression that while he was at Lincoln his attentions were entirely upon his studies.

I will begin my revision of the *De Rebus a se Gestis* by subjecting its account of Gerald’s curial career to critical scrutiny. I will do the same for the *De Rebus* version of Gerald’s departure from court. Gerald’s correspondence, particularly two letters he included in the *Symbolum Electorum*, substantially discredit the rhetoric of pious resignation that Gerald coupled with the Wechelen story to valorize his change of life. Indeed these letters introduce a man scarcely mentioned in the *De Rebus a se Gestis*, the malevolent William Wibert, a Cistercian abbot who was to serve as one of the principle villains in Gerald’s public career. These letters also date Gerald’s departure from court significantly later than the *De Rebus* would have us believe.

I will subject Gerald’s claims about his activities in the years between his
departure from court and his election to the see of St. David in 1199 to similar scrutiny. In the *De Rebus a se Gestis*, Gerald deliberately papered over his involvement in a series of terrible events in Wales with repeated references to his study of theology at Lincoln during the same years. These chaotic events in Wales culminated not only in the excommunication of Gerald’s cousin, the Lord Rhys, but in the ceremonial flogging of Rhys’s stinking corpse and the revenge-plundering of Gerald’s richest prebend by his own cousins. Despite the obvious importance of these events, an importance reflected in Gerald’s letters, he made no mention of them in the *De Rebus*. And yet, not only were these important events, they were also symptomatic of the growing unrest in native Wales that culminated in the general uprising of the Welsh which was crushed at Painscastle in August of 1198. I will conclude this chapter with a consideration of both the events leading up to the Painscastle disaster and the devastating impact of that defeat.

**Gerald’s Curial Career According to the *De Rebus a se Gestis***

If the *De Rebus a se Gestis* was the only surviving source for the author’s activities from 1184 to 1194, historians would be presented with a puzzling contradiction. Gerald claimed, in the *De Rebus*, that he had been called to the Plantagenet court against his will to help pacify Wales; and yet, in the account of his ten years’ service that follows Gerald implies that he scarcely served in Wales at all. Gerald’s highly selective account of his service to the Plantagenets occurs in the *De Rebus a se Gestis* in Book II, chapters vii-xiv. His bitter renunciation of the court is the explicit topic of Book III chapter i, and
Gerald’s departure from the royal service is implicit in the following five chapters.\(^{135}\)

How would we understand Gerald’s curial service if we had only the evidence of the *De Rebus a se Gestis*?

In Book II chapter vii Gerald claimed that he became attached to the court because his fame had attracted the attention of Henry II. When the king was on the March “intent upon the pacification of Wales,” he summoned Gerald to give advice.\(^{136}\) By comparing the *De Rebus a se Gestis* to the surviving itinerary of Henry II, Robert Bartlett dated this event to 1184.\(^{137}\) It is significant to note that, according to Gerald, he was called to court while the king was present in Wales on a mission of “pacification,” *ad Walliam pacificandum* - not on a mission of conquest.\(^{138}\)

Gerald presented his attachment to the court in a way which both absolved him of

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\(^{135}\) Although the only surviving copy of the *De Rebus* ends at Book III chapter xix, we can be confident that the missing chapters contained nothing further about Gerald’s years as a curial clerk: the surviving list of chapter headings indicates that the all-consuming issue of the St. David’s controversy filled the remaining 232 chapters. *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I*, pp. 3-18

\(^{136}\) Butler, p. 81; *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I*, p. 57.

\(^{137}\) Bartlett, p. 58 n. 1.

\(^{138}\) *Pacificare* could imply subduing or repressing acts of violence, but also connoted appeasing, settling, or satisfying a dispute. If Gerald wanted to imply conquest or domination, as in the case of his kinsmen in the conquest of Ireland, he would have used a stronger verb, perhaps some form of *expugnare* not *pacificare*. For example, in the dedicatory preface of the *Expugnatio Hibernica* Gerald promised to tell the story “of the subjugation of the Irish people, and of the taming of the ferocity of a very barbarous nation…” *Hibernice gentis expugnacionem, et tam barbare nacionis feritatem... edomitam*. *Expugnatio Hibernica*, pp. 22-23.
ambition and exaggerated his importance; he claimed that he was summoned to Henry’s presence “on the advice of his magnates.”\textsuperscript{139} Gerald wrote that he obeyed this summons out of a sense of duty, but had been “most unwilling (for as he values the scholar’s life above all others, even so he detests the life of a courtier), and yet by reason of the King’s urgency and also of his promises and commands, he became a follower of the Court, and the King’s clerk.” Once attached to Henry’s court, Gerald claimed that he had served loyally: “…for many years he had been a faithful servant following the court, and had accomplished much toward the pacification of Wales and the preservation of Wales in peace.”\textsuperscript{140} In this roundabout way - while carefully describing himself as an agent of peace rather than conquest - Gerald acknowledged that his chief responsibility had been helping to implement Plantagenet policy in his homeland. In the very same chapter in which he described his having been called to court, Gerald lamented never having received any appropriate reward for the services he had rendered: “…none the less on account of his kinship with Rhys ap Gruffydd and other princes of Wales, he received of the King, who enriched and promoted so many unworthy persons, nothing save empty promises void of all truth.” Gerald claimed that Henry praised him in secret for “his self-restraint, his modesty and his fidelity,” but told his intimate advisors that he would not advance him any further: “…if he had not been born in Wales and bound so closely by ties of blood to the magnates of Wales, and more especially to Rhys, he would of his

\textsuperscript{139} Butler, p. 81; \textit{Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I}, p. 57.

\textsuperscript{140} Butler, p. 81 “Cum ergo pluribus annis curial sequendo fideliter servisset, et ad Walliam pacificandum et in pace tenendum plurimum profecisset…” \textit{Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I}, p. 57.
bounty have exalted him by the bestowal of ecclesiastical dignities and rich rewards and would have made him a great man in his kingdom.\textsuperscript{141}

Gerald wrote of his service to the court in Welsh affairs only twice more in Book II: in chapters ix and xxi. In chapter ix, Gerald described in some detail a polite dispute he had with the Lord Rhys over a matter of family honor and prestige during a diplomatic conference at Hereford. Gerald’s task at the conference had been, of course, to represent the interests of the King of England. Nevertheless, in the \textit{De Rebus} he memorialized his boastful disputation with the Lord Rhys – with whom he was supposed to be negotiating - rather than recording anything at all about his official responsibilities in the royal service.

Within the narrative of the \textit{De Rebus}, the Hereford conference serves as an opportunity for Gerald to praise his own family. Gerald recorded Rhys’s good-natured banter about the declining fortunes of the de Barri family in Wales to demonstrate his easy and mutually respectful relationship with Deheubarth’s greatest prince. In response to Rhys’s teasing, Gerald then indulged in a long-winded recitation of the conquests and holdings of his own family not only in Wales, but also in Ireland.\textsuperscript{142} Nowhere does Gerald record his own shrewdness or hard bargaining on the part of his royal master. Throughout the chapter, Gerald described his diplomatic work in a way calculated to minimize the disjunction between his curial service and his post-1199 image as a champion of the native Welsh. Indeed, nowhere in the \textit{De Rebus} did Gerald ever acknowledge that any embassy of his might have thwarted the native Welsh inside Wales.

\textsuperscript{141} Butler, p. 81; \textit{Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I}, p. 57.

\textsuperscript{142} Butler, pp. 83-84. \textit{Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I}, pp. 57-60.
At most, he claimed that he had kept the peace. Indeed he concluded Book II chapter ix by reminding the reader that he had “turned aside not a few of Rhys’s great armies from the king’s land, which he was preparing to invade.”

In chapter xxi, Gerald told the farcical story of his urgent delegation to Wales between the reigns of Henry II and Richard I. Here again, a chapter ostensibly detailing Gerald’s diplomatic efforts in Wales imparts nothing of substance about his diplomatic work for the Plantagenet curia. The story begins with the death of Henry II at Le Mans in the summer of 1189. Gerald claimed that he had been on the Continent serving in the old king’s entourage, and that upon his death “…by the advice of the Archbishop of Canterbury, [he] was on account of the change of Kings sent with many letters to preserve peace in Wales.” Gerald claimed that, due to an outbreak of plague and to contrary winds, he had to abandon his retinue and most of his baggage at Dieppe. The urgent nature of his business made waiting for a fair wind impossible; he was forced to traverse the French coast northeast to Flanders in the company of knights and with only a total stranger as a follower. During a difficult stretch of the journey, this stranger disappeared with Gerald’s money, his luggage, his manuscripts, and his extra horse. Because Gerald believed retracing his route would have been too dangerous, he resolved

143 Butler, p. 84. “…exercitus Resi plurimos, praeter alia servitia magna, a terra regis quam impetere parabam.” Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I, p. 60.

144 Butler, pp. 111-116; Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I, pp. 80-84.

145 Butler, 112. “…consilio Cantuariensis archiepiscopi, ad servandam pacem in Walliae finibus propter regum mutationem Giraldus archidiaconus cum literis multis.” Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I, pp. 80-81.
to carry on to Abbeville and wait. The following day, the stranger arrived unharmed and restored to Gerald all of his belongings. Gerald dedicated several pages of the *De Rebus* to his lost and found luggage. The diplomatic mission that had been the whole object of this odyssey he described in just one sentence: “And after delivering the Count’s letters which were addressed to the justiciar, he hastened on his way to Wales, where he gave the Count’s letters to those to whom they were sent, and by his coming and intervention did much to restore peace in his native land which was greatly disturbed owing to the King’s death.”

While Gerald described his induction into curial service in the context of his role in the “pacification of Wales,” in the chapters that follow he deliberately downplayed his service to the crown in the land of his birth. Instead, Gerald exalted his brief diplomatic assignment in Ireland and his five weeks’ preaching tour through Wales on behalf of the Third Crusade. To put it another way, sixteen chapters of the *De Rebus* treat in some way Gerald’s years of curial service, but only three of these chapters so much as mention his diplomatic efforts on behalf of the Plantagenets in Wales. In fact, a historian with only the *De Rebus a se Gestis* to guide him would have to conclude that Gerald spent most of his time either pursuing clerical reform in Ireland, preaching the crusade in Wales, or declining the many bishoprics offered to him by important men. To fully comprehend how grotesque is this distortion, it is necessary to consider briefly these other thirteen chapters of the *De Rebus* which treat Gerald’s years in the curial service.

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146 Butler, p. 116; “Datisque literis comitis quibus fuerant destinatae, patriam prae morete regis valde turbatam plurimum adventu et interventu suo pacificavit.” *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I*, p. 84.
Gerald dedicated Book II chapters x-xvi of the *De Rebus* to his several months’ service, between 1185-6, in Ireland. Only two of these seven chapters, x and xii, treat Gerald’s 1185 service in John’s entourage, and these are brief. The remaining chapters are for the most part concerned with the Irish church: the famous privilege of Pope Adrian to Henry II; a vision of Gerald’s condemning John’s stinginess toward the church in Ireland; Gerald’s refusal of two Irish sees offered to him by John; and Gerald’s chauvinistic address to the Council of Dublin. In the last chapter concerned with his stint in Ireland, Gerald commemorated the composition of his first major work, the *Topography of Ireland*, and his celebrated public recital of that work at Oxford.

According to the *De Rebus*, Gerald returned briefly to Wales before reciting his *Topographia Hiberniae* at Oxford. He does not record being in Wales again until his service in the entourage of Archbishop Baldwin on the preaching tour that prelate undertook to recruit Welshmen for the Third Crusade during Lent of 1188. Book II chapters xvii-xx summarize the famous preaching tour; chapter xxii is also tangentially connected to the crusade. While Gerald claimed that he had been sent to assist Baldwin “at the urgent request of the King,” only two chapters in the *De Rebus* describing the preaching tour touch even remotely upon the relationship between Wales and the crown. In chapter xviii, Gerald claimed that Count John accused him of

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148 Butler, pp. 98-105; 116-117; *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I*, pp. 73-79; 84-85.

149 Butler, p. 98; “ad instantiam regis” *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I*, p. 74.
deliberately depopulating his lands of soldiers.\footnote{Butler, p. 101; \textit{Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I}, p. 76.} In the next chapter, Gerald reported that Rhys’s fool John Spang accused him of similar designs against Deheubarth.\footnote{Butler, p. 102; \textit{Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I}, p. 77.}

Gerald’s principal concern in describing the preaching tour of Wales was to impress upon the reader the wonder and majesty of his own oratory. He modestly claimed to have brought crowds to tears despite the fact that he preached in Latin or in French, but never in Welsh.\footnote{Butler, pp. 101; \textit{Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I}, p. 76.} Gerald concluded his description of the preaching tour much as he concluded his account of his activities in Ireland, with a story commending his own literary skill. Gerald claimed that Baldwin had praised his style and that the archbishop had designated Gerald to record his deeds on the forthcoming crusade.\footnote{Butler, pp. 104-105 “This is he who shall tell of it in prose, while my nephew Joseph shall record it in verse.” ”Hic est,” inquit, “qui prosaice tractabit, et nepos meus Joseph metrice…” \textit{Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I}, p.79.}

In Book II chapter xxii, Gerald copied into the \textit{De Rebus} the absolution he had procured from his crusading vows through the papal legate John of Anagni. John absolved him on account of his poverty; Gerald had expected to make his pilgrimage in King Henry’s entourage, but Henry had died. At the same time, Gerald procured the absolution of his unpopular bishop, Peter de Leia, on account of the prelate’s advanced age. Gerald claimed that this act proved that he was free from unseemly ambition.

In the last two chapters of the \textit{De Rebus} treating his years as a curial clerk, Gerald
sought to reinforce the impression that he had spent those years at arms-length from the
Plantagenets’ Welsh policy. In chapter xxiii, Gerald recorded that he had urged John to
prove himself in Ireland while King Richard was absent on Crusade, rather than “…
alone of princes, sit idle-handed, doing naught.” Gerald also recorded John’s cool
response: “But the Earl did not regard his words with favour and replied that, not having
so many kinsmen in Ireland, he had not such a liking for that country as the archdeacon.”
Before Richard departed for crusade, he had allowed John to marry Isabella of
Gloucester; this marriage gave John the marcher lordships of Glamorgan and Newport
and made him a major landholder in Wales. It is noteworthy that Gerald claimed to
have suggested to John that he consolidate and expand his Irish rather than his Welsh
holdings. In the final chapter of Book II, Gerald recalled the bishoprics he had been
offered and had declined, “two in Ireland and two in Wales.” Gerald claimed he had
preferred study to any promotion to the episcopacy: “For it had been a marvel that, even
when he followed the Court, he none the less wrote histories, and after long and laborious
journeys, such as are the lot of courtiers, would keep vigil ‘til dawn, working by
 candlelight and joining night to day, as though he were in the schools and set on naught
save study.”

154 Butler, p. 118; Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I, p. 86.
156 Butler, p. 121; Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I, p. 87.
157 Butler, p. 122; Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I, p. 87.
Gerald’s Curial Career Reconsidered

While it is not an outright fiction, the *De Rebus a se Gestis* version of Gerald’s service to the Plantagenet court should not be received without substantial reservations. Both Gerald’s claim that he was hesitant to serve at court and his complaint that his Welsh relations placed him at a disadvantage ought to be regarded with some skepticism. The disproportionate emphasis that the *De Rebus* places on the work Gerald undertook in Ireland and on behalf of the Third Crusade at the expense of his diplomatic work in Wales on behalf of the Plantagenet court should also arouse our suspicion. The contrast between the *De Rebus a se Gestis* account of Gerald’s curial service and what he wrote about these same years elsewhere, particularly in some of the letters he compiled in the *Symbolum Electorum*, reveals most vividly how distorted and even deceptive the *De Rebus* is where it concerns these years.

Gerald’s claim, in the *De Rebus a se Gestis*, that he was reluctant to serve in the curia of Henry II must be understood as a backward-looking revision of his own career. Gerald adopted a pro-Welsh stance during the St. David’s controversy (1199-1203), and he seems largely to have maintained that stance through the period in which he composed the *De Rebus a se Gestis* (c. 1208-1216). In light of the profound ambition Gerald exhibited from the earliest days of his public career, however, it seems very unlikely that he entered into the royal service reluctantly in 1184. Consider Gerald’s earliest adventures in church reform. In Book I chapter iii of the *De Rebus a se Gestis*, Gerald recalled that he stopped at Canterbury on the way home to Wales from his first period of study at Paris. Young Master Giraldus ingratiated himself with Archbishop Richard (d.
1184), who at that time enjoyed not only metropolitan but legatian authority. Having convinced the archbishop to depute this authority to himself where it concerned the see of St. David’s, Gerald hurried home to hector the rural clergy and laity of southwestern Wales into conformity with the reforming ideas of Rome and Paris. In the process, he managed to have himself appointed archdeacon of Brecon at the expense of an elderly cleric who could not bring himself to put away his mistress. In 1177, only a few years later and while Gerald was still a very young man, the chapter of St. David’s put him forward as their preferred candidate to replace his uncle as bishop. Henry II would not consent to Gerald and instead promoted a foreigner, Peter de Leia. When this absentee bishop turned out to be incapable of getting along with his chapter, Gerald presented himself as the solution to the problem. Peter “committed the general care and custody of the diocese into the hands of Master Giraldus the archdeacon, giving him full control of all things spiritual and temporal, save only those sacraments that are reserved for bishops alone.”158 Once Peter could no longer get along with Gerald and withdrew this authority, the archdeacon of Brecon left Wales entirely and returned to the Paris schools.

Despite his extensive study in Paris, Gerald’s oft-repeated claim that he preferred the life of a scholar to a public career should not be accepted uncritically. In the De Rebus a se Gestis and elsewhere Gerald made protestations of his lack of ambition and praised a life of study. Such rhetoric is tropological and self-serving. Consider Gerald’s description of his house at Llandew in the Itinerarium Kambriae:

In this most temperate area I myself have been appointed to a post of some

158 Butler, p. 74; Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I, p. 54.
importance… but it affords me no great promise of wealth and certainly no expectation of ever playing my part in the tragic pomps and ceremonies of this world. I occupy a tiny dwelling-house not far from the principal castle of Brecknockshire, and indeed, adjacent to it. This is convenient enough for my studies and my work, and here I pass my time in a sort of happy-go-lucky mediocrity. The house gives me pleasure and it is conducive to thoughts of the next world. I would not change it for all the riches of Croesus. I certainly prefer it beyond all measure to the perishable and transitory things of this world. 

The very work in which this profession of simplicity appears is itself a record of Gerald’s service in the entourage of the most powerful prelate in the British Isles, Baldwin, archbishop of Canterbury. Gerald had been attached to Baldwin to assist him in preaching the crusade by Henry II, arguably the most powerful king in Europe. Throughout the preaching tour, Gerald carefully cultivated the archbishop. He claimed that Baldwin was pleased when presented with a copy of the Topographia Hibernica and that the busy prelate studied it closely. Years later, when he described their preaching tour in the De Rebus a se Gestis, Gerald claimed that Baldwin was so impressed by both his literary skill and his prospects for advancement that the archbishop proposed attaching one of his own kinsmen to Gerald. A cleric traveling in such rarefied circles and expending such great effort to gain the attention of his superiors cannot be taken literally when waxing poetic about his own simplicity.

Furthermore, it is almost unimaginable that any of the men who served at the court of Henry II lacked ambition. Courtiers did not stumble into curial service. In Men Raised from the Dust, Ralph Turner has described the “new men” at the courts of Henry

159 Journey, p. 107; Giraldi Cambrensis Opera VI, p. 47.

160 Journey, p. 80; Giraldi Cambrensis Opera VI, p. 20.

161 Butler, p. 104; Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I, p. 79.
II and his sons; these men rose through their mastery of curial skills – literacy, numeracy, a practical understanding of the law – but they gained their initial opportunities through patronage.¹⁶² Martin Aurell characterized placement into curial service to the Plantagenets as “clients of powerful men exploiting their links of clientage with greater men to get an entry at court.”¹⁶³ Indeed Aurell has argued that many of the best creative minds assembled at the Plantagenet Court, men such as John of Salisbury, Peter of Blois, and Gerald himself, served “…in response to the political impulse of raw power, which alone could have succeeded in mobilizing these intellectuals, who were otherwise natural critics of the court.”¹⁶⁴ Both modern biographers of Hubert Walter have emphasized the importance of Hubert’s client relationship to his uncle Glanville in the initial stages of this future archbishop’s meteoric rise.¹⁶⁵

It seems unlikely, therefore, that Gerald was summoned to court purely as a response to the advice of Henry’s magnates. Patrons lobbied for curial clerkships for their clients; clients harassed their patrons for such opportunities - strings were pulled. Gerald’s elite education and kinship to native Welsh princes must have made him an attractive candidate for curial service, but it seems reasonable to assume that Gerald was


¹⁶⁴ Aurell, p. 60.

summoned to court at least in part as a result of lobbying by his marcher kinsmen. I admit that Robert Bartlett thought this unlikely. He wrote that Gerald’s family connections were good for “swift local patronage and a comfortable ecclesiastical position in south-west Wales” but not sufficient for “immediate access to the sources of central patronage.” However, at the very time Gerald was summoned to the court his kinsmen were enjoying royal favor. In 1182, Gerald’s cousin Meiler fitz Henry (d. 1212) was married to a niece of Henry’s agent in Ireland, the powerful Hugh de Lacy. Hugh even constructed a castle for Meiler at Timahoe. The following year another of Gerald’s cousins and the hero of his Expugnatio Hibernica, Raymond “le Gros” fitz William (d. circa 1189), had a castle built for him by royal officials at Fotharta Uí Nualláin. When Gerald’s brother Philip de Barri (d. 1199) crossed over to Ireland in 1183 to take possession of three cantreds of land in Desmond, Gerald accompanied him. That is to say, less than a year before Gerald was summoned to Henry’s

166 Bartlett, pp. 60-61.


presence, he had made a journey to Ireland to visit his kinsmen who were themselves enjoying favorable marriages, new lands, and new fortifications at the hands of royal agents. It seems likely that their place in the sunshine of royal favor and Gerald’s advancement were connected.

Even if Gerald’s summons to court was not the result of active lobbying by the de Barri branch of his family, it certainly owed something to his kinship with the Lord Rhys. Gerald complained bitterly that his curial service never obtained for him an adequate reward despite his having been “of great assistance in the pacification of Wales.” In the De Rebus and elsewhere, he attributed this lack of advancement to the king’s suspicion of his “kinship with Rhys ap Gruffydd and other princes of Wales.” Surely Gerald would not have been charged with assisting in the “pacification of Wales” had he no kinship ties with the most powerful of the native Welsh princes. Gerald attributed his failure to win enrichment and promotion to his ties to the native Welsh, but this claim must be weighed against the indisputable fact that without the accident of his mixed heritage, Gerald would not have been of any special use to Henry in the first place.

If Gerald’s account of how he was called to court seems suspicious, the De Rebus a se Gestis narrative of his decade in the royal service is surely selective and misleading. There can be no doubt that Gerald served in John’s entourage in Ireland. There is no reason to doubt that Gerald stayed on in Ireland for several months after John returned to England and that he involved himself in efforts to “reform” the Irish church. It is certain that Gerald served in the entourage of archbishop Baldwin during his preaching tour of

\[170\text{ Butler, p. 81; Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I, p. 57.}\]
Wales in 1188. However, in the De Rebus Gerald stressed these weeks and months of service at the expense of his years of substantial diplomatic efforts on behalf of Henry II and Richard I in Wales.

During Gerald’s time as a curial clerk, Plantagenet policy in Ireland was in a state of flux and adjustment. One of Henry’s experiments in governing this unexpected addition to his empire was to make his nineteen year old son John Dominus Hiberniae, Lord of Ireland. In 1185, the king sent John to Ireland with a substantial military force and with an entourage of advisors, Gerald among them. According to Gerald, he was included because he “had a great host of kinsmen there, sprung from the first conquerors of that nation, and because he had shown himself an honest and prudent man.” Gerald arrived with John in April. By December, John had departed in frustration. Attached to Bertram de Verdun, Gerald remained behind in Ireland for several more months; he used this opportunity both to observe the royal administration and to research and draft his Topographia Hibernica. However important this entire episode may have been, it did not take up more than a year out of Gerald’s decade of curial service. And yet, when Gerald composed the De Rebus, he dedicated six chapters to his Irish service. Similarly, Gerald undertook but one preaching tour through Wales with Archbishop Baldwin; it

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171 Gerald reckoned John’s performance abysmal, and most historians have accepted his interpretation. For a dissent from this orthodoxy and a defense of John’s conduct in Ireland, see James Lydon, The Lordship of Ireland in the Middle Ages, (Toronto: Gill and Macmillan, 1972), p. 63.

172 Butler, p. 86; Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I, p. 61.

173 Butler, p. 90; Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I, p. 65.
lasted only five weeks. In the *De Rebus*, four chapters are dedicated to this five week
tour. In other words, while Gerald dedicated ten chapters of the *De Rebus* to these two
short-term events, he wrote only three chapters which in any way treat his diplomatic
work in Wales on behalf of the Plantagenets. This in spite of the fact that, over the
course of ten years, Gerald made numerous journeys through Wales in pursuit of the
Plantagenet policy of “pacification.”

Letters Gerald compiled in the *Symbolum Electorum* reveal what he preferred to
conceal in the *De Rebus a se Gestis*. For example, the last diplomatic effort in Wales that
Gerald admitted having undertaken on behalf of the Plantagenets in the *De Rebus* is his
farcical “lost luggage” embassy from the Continent to Wales (Book II chapter xxi). By
writing that he undertook this mission after Henry II died, but while Richard was still
“count” and not yet “king,” Gerald effectively dated this mission to summer of 1189.174
If we had only the *De Rebus* it would be impossible to know whether Gerald had ever
served under Richard after he was crowned.175 We learn from the *Symbolum Electorum*,
however, that Gerald had served King Richard’s curia for years and that he frequently
shuttled back and forth between Richard’s regency government and the courts of the

174 Butler, p. 111; *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I*, p. 80.

175 “The Count” in the passage which follows is John: “And when these letters had been
received and given careful hearing in the presence of Queen Eleanor, the Count’s mother
and Berengaria, her daughter-in-law, and also of his secretaries, the Count straightway
gave them a most kindly answer with much commendation of Giralduus the Archdeacon,
saying that he had served his father and himself both long and faithfully.” Butler, p. 153;
*Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I*, p. 109.
Welsh princes.\textsuperscript{176} In the first letter of the \textit{Symbolum Electorum}, Gerald wrote that his enemy and betrayer William Wibert accompanied him on three separate legations into Wales.\textsuperscript{177} Before these three legations, Gerald had likely already served the regency government of the absent Richard for two years or more.\textsuperscript{178}

Gerald’s Departure from Court and Retreat into Study in the \textit{De Rebus a se Gestis}

If, in the \textit{De Rebus a se Gestis}, Gerald was selective in describing his service to the Plantagenets, he was deliberately obscure about when he left the royal service and positively evasive about the circumstances surrounding his departure from the court. Gerald compounded these evasions with a deceptive account of his activities between his departure from court and his election to the see of St. David’s in 1199. It is possible to date Gerald’s departure from royal service to c. 1194, but this date cannot be derived from the vague and partial evidence of the \textit{De Rebus a se Gestis}. In the \textit{De Rebus}, Gerald’s sparse descriptions of his departure from the court occur periodically from Book

\textsuperscript{176} I highlight this to contrast the narrative Gerald constructed for the \textit{De Rebus} with what we learn in his other works. I do not claim that historians have been fooled by the \textit{De Rebus} into thinking that Gerald’s primary curial duty was anything but the royal policy in Wales. Both Robert Bartlett and Michael Richter understood this to be the case, and John Gillingham went so far as to assign considerable importance to Gerald’s role in the Welsh policies of Henry II and Richard I. See Bartlett, pp. 15-16; Richter, \textit{Giraldus Cambrensis} p. 88, and “Gerald of Wales, a Reassessment…” p. 383; and John Gillingham, “Henry II, Richard I, and the Lord Rhys,” \textit{Peritia, Journal of the Medieval Academy of Ireland} 10, (1996): p. 231.

\textsuperscript{177} “Sic igitur ter mecum eundo…” \textit{Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I}, p. 204.

\textsuperscript{178} “Apud curiam igitur Anglorum reginae, et matris domini regis, transacto iam triennio” \textit{Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I}, p. 203.
II chapter xxiv to Book III chapter vi. Close scrutiny of the few events in those chapters that can be assigned a definite date reveals a gap of as much as five years in the narrative. This gap ought to excite our suspicion. Furthermore, the contrast between the *De Rebus* account of Gerald’s activities from late 1191 until his election to the see of St. David’s in 1199 and what he wrote about these same years elsewhere is damning. Such a comparison proves that Gerald, by pairing calculated chronological inexactitude with a high-minded rhetoric of religious renunciation, set out to mislead readers of the *De Rebus a se Gestis*. The Wechelen story serves as the rhetorical pinnacle of this project of deception. I will first examine in some detail the vague *De Rebus a se Gestis* version of the end of Gerald’s curial career and his activities until 1196. I will then review the *De Rebus a se Gestis* version of Gerald’s period of study at Lincoln, from 1196-1199. Having done so, I will contrast the *De Rebus* version of these events with the evidence of letters included in the *Symbolum Electorum* to demonstrate the deliberate obscurity and even deceptiveness of the *De Rebus* where it concerns Gerald’s activities for most of the 1190’s.

To the extent that the *De Rebus* reveals anything about Gerald’s activities from the end of his curial service up to 1196, the year he left for Lincoln, it does so from the last chapter of Book II to Book III chapter vi. I am charging Gerald with deliberate obscurity in these chapters. Therefore, it is necessary to scrutinize these chapters closely for the few dateable events Gerald included. These dateable events will establish a rough chronology for the *De Rebus* version of Gerald’s departure from court. Later in this chapter, I will compare the *De Rebus* chronology of these years with the evidence of the
In the last chapter of Book II of the *De Rebus*, chapter xxiv, Gerald claimed that John had offered him the see of Llandaff. John made this offer before Gerald left the court: “… in process of time, when the Chancellor had been deposed by the Earl and cast out of England, and the Earl himself held, as it were, the position of Viceroy, he offered the Archdeacon the Bishopric of Llandaff, whose cathedral Church with the greater part of the diocese was in his lands of Glamorgan.”

The chancellor “deposed by the Earl” was the hated William Longchamp, bishop of Ely; he was “cast out of England” in October 1191. William de Salso Marisco was bishop of Llandaff from 1186 to 1191; when he died, his see was vacant until Henry de Abergavenny was consecrated in December, 1193. Therefore, this last event of Book II must have taken place sometime after October 1191 but before autumn 1193, as the chapter of Llandaff would have needed time for the formalities preceding Bishop Henry’s consecration. The *De Rebus* never mentions Henry de Abergavenny and this passage implies that the casting out of Longchamp and John’s offer of the see of Llandaff happened around the same time.

Therefore, the reader of the *De Rebus* is led to believe that the last significant experience

179 Butler, p. 121; *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I*, p. 87.


181 In all likelihood John made this offer well before 1193. In the *De Invectionibus*, Gerald wrote that William died and John offered him the see while Richard was still “in transmarinis Palestine.” Richard I departed the Holy Land in October of 1192. *De Invect.*, p. 193.
Gerald had as a curial clerk occurred c. late 1191.

Book III of the *De Rebus* opens with Gerald’s melodramatic renunciation of the court. This first chapter is entirely rhetorical and offers no event by which Gerald’s departure from the royal service can be dated. Book III chapter ii is the Wechelen story.\(^{182}\) Book III chapter iii contains several events that can be assigned a date; Gerald wrote that he wanted to return to Paris to study theology, but that as he was about to depart he heard that “…the war between King Philip and King Richard, which he had been told was for the time being lulled to sleep by a five-years truce, had once more broken out.”\(^{183}\) Richard and Philip’s uneasy truce degenerated into open war in the summer of 1196.\(^{184}\) Denied the opportunity to go to France, Gerald repaired to Lincoln, 150 miles away in the Midlands of England. He wrote that he studied there “for several years” until Bishop Peter of St. David’s died; Peter de Leia died on July 16, 1198.\(^{185}\) In Book III chapter iv, Gerald repeated that Peter died “about the beginning of autumn” while mentioning that the battle at Painscastle had happened that same year around the same time. The battle at Painscastle occurred August 13, 1198. Gerald does not record

\(^{182}\) While Gerald mentioned the battle at Painscastle in the Wechelen story, it is clear from the story that Painscastle was a topic of conversation in a later visit Gerald paid to the anchorite, but that it was not discussed when Gerald brought to Wechelen his plan to go and study theology at Lincoln because it had not happened yet.

\(^{183}\) Butler, p. 127; *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I*, p. 93.

\(^{184}\) Richard had invaded Brittany during Holy Week of 1196 because the Bretons, holding him responsible for the kidnapping of Duchess Constance, had abandoned their allegiance to him in favor of Philip. Philip attacked Aumâle in July. Gillingham, *Richard I*, pp. 298-299.

\(^{185}\) Butler, p. 128; *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I*, p. 94.
departing from Lincoln until after Easter in 1199.\textsuperscript{186}

These few dateable events do little to ameliorate the vagueness of Gerald’s account of his own activities during these years. Indeed, the evidence of the \textit{De Rebus a se Gestis} does not allow us to date Gerald’s resignation from the court with any precision. Because the last event Gerald mentioned in connection to his curial service that can be dated with any certainty probably occurred in late 1191 or perhaps sometime in 1192, one could easily infer that Gerald resigned from Plantagenet service in late 1191 or some time in 1192. The next event Gerald recorded in the \textit{De Rebus}, however, was his departure for Lincoln. This can be dated fairly closely to spring or summer of 1196, when the truce between the kings of England and France broke down and made it impossible for him to go to Paris. In the \textit{De Rebus a se Gestis}, then, all that Gerald recorded of his activities from late 1191 until summer 1196 was that he turned down the see of Llandaff, resigned from court, met with Wechelen, and set out for Lincoln.

Or, to put it another way, Gerald papered over a gaping chronological hole of almost five years between Book II chapter xxiv and Book III chapter iii with a rhetorical chapter denouncing the court (Book III chapter i) and with the Wechelen story (Book III chapter ii). These chapters, therefore, merit close scrutiny. Gerald opened Book III with his dramatic renunciation of the court:

Now Giraldus, considering that his following of the Court was utterly in vain, vain too all promises, vain all promotions offered him, vain and unworthy of himself and his deserts, withdrew himself wholly from the turmoil of the Court as from a stormy sea, a course which he had long since conceived in his mind and

\textsuperscript{186} Book III chs. xi; xii. Butler, pp. 154-155; \textit{Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I}, pp. 109-111.
now gradually had begun to follow; and with salutary wisdom he resolved to
transfer himself to the schools as to a calm and tranquil haven. For he oft recalled
to mind the word of Plinius Secundus, “Leave noise and useless running hither
and thither and foolish toils, as soon as occasion offers, and give yourself up for
study; for leisure is honourable and sweet, and study is a fairer thing than almost
any business.” And again, “Give mean and groveling cares to others and claim
yourself for study in some high and lofty retreat.\textsuperscript{187}

Gerald placed the Wechelen story immediately after this grandiose rhetoric of
renunciation. Immediately following the Wechelen story, Gerald described his 1196
departure for Lincoln. The impression Gerald sought to make on the reader of \textit{De Rebus}
was that his scholarly and pious convictions had together driven him to resign from court.
Having done so, he immediately took spiritual counsel and retreated into study. Gerald
never explicitly claimed that his resignation and retirement from study were in such close
chronological proximity – he simply allowed his readers to assume so based upon the
way the rhetoric of Book III chapter i flowed into the Wechelen story in chapter ii.

This is not the only deceitful aspect of the \textit{De Rebus} account of Gerald’s activities
in the 1190’s. Gerald went to a great deal of trouble to create the illusion that once he set
out for Lincoln in 1196 he stayed there, cut off from the worldly affairs of the court and
of Wales, until 1199. In Book III, chapter iii, immediately following the Wechelen story,
Gerald wrote:

So for the sake of study he went to Lincoln, where he knew that the science of
Theology flourished most soundly in all England, under that best of teachers,
Master William de Monte, so-called because he had read in Paris at Mont Ste
Genéviève, where the Archdeacon had known him. And having continued his
studies there for several years, at last, since there is naught on earth that standeth
sure nor aught in this life that knows no variation, Peter, Bishop of Mynyw,
having meanwhile been taken from this world, Giraldus was urged by letters and

\textsuperscript{187} Butler, p. 123; \textit{Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I}, p. 89.
frequent messages both from the Chapter of Mynyw and from the barons of his native land, that he should at once go to the King, to whose father he had rendered such service, as well as to himself, and that, having the favour and assent of all, he should seek and obtain the Bishopric of St. David’s. But since he was wholly devoted to his studies and desired no other life on earth so much as this, he replied not once only, but often and always, that a man worthy to be a Bishop should be sought by others, not seek it for himself; and that if he himself sought the Bishopric, he would thereby prove himself unworthy of the office, and further that, since what he had sufficed him, he was unwilling for any reason to leave his studies and the tranquility of the best of all ways in which he then was living.  

In Book III chapters iv, v, vi and x, Gerald took every opportunity to repeat his claim that he had renounced ambition and retreated entirely into study at Lincoln. Indeed, he repeats it incessantly. In chapter iv, Gerald wrote that Hubert Walter had remained on the march in the aftermath of the battle at Painscastle and that he was asked to name Gerald, “who was then in the schools,” as an administrator for the possessions of the vacant see of St. David’s. Hubert crowned his refusal even to consider Gerald as the administrator of the see with a public outburst.

Gerald claimed that news of Hubert’s outburst had gotten back to Lincoln and prompted him to write directly to the archbishop. That letter, copied into Book III in chapter v, is unrelenting on the subject of its author’s supposed retreat into scholarship. Gerald claimed to have been surprised by Hubert’s hostility, “and thought it all the more worthy of wonder, since for the past two years I have lived in all simplicity and innocency, given wholly to the study of theology and hurting no man in all the world either by word or deed or even by writing.”

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188 Butler, pp. 127-128; Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I, pp. 93-94.

189 “qui tunc in scolis fuerant” Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I, p. 95.

190 Butler, p. 132; Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I, p. 97.
his revenues if Hubert would only spare his reputation, imploring, “be it granted to me to lie hid and to indulge myself with my books and writing for the rest of my days without vexation. I have thus far given too much time to ambition and my own perdition…”

While the chapter at St. David’s had not yet nominated anyone to replace Bishop Peter, Gerald used the opportunity presented by Hubert’s refusal to have him as the administrator of the vacant see to launch a pre-emptive nolo episcopari: “Wherefore if by canonical election I were now called to some worthier See of England or of France that might chance to be vacant, God, the searcher out of men’s hearts… knows that even then, to obtain such greatness, I would not desert my study of the Holy Scriptures to which, God helping me, I have given myself with all my strength.”

Gerald then returned to the theme that his new vocation made it impossible to have offended the archbishop “unless indeed I am to be blamed for my vehement zeal in the study of sacred learning.” He begged Hubert, “…only grant me permission to lie hid and indulge my study of the Scripture, in the knowledge of which I deem it desirable not only to dwell, but even to die and dying win salvation.”

Gerald concluded on a similar note (but not without a subtle parting shot at his antagonist/correspondent):

Wherefore may your fatherly piety and the God of mercy grant that I may pass the little that is left of life in pleasant quietude far from the cares and ambitions of the Court, that ever wound the heart and satisfy it not, and apart from the noise of the multitude, weeping and redeeming, as best I may, the time that I have wasted in

191 Butler, p. 133; Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I, p. 98.
192 Butler, p. 134; Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I, p. 99.
194 Butler, p. 135; Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I, pp. 99-100.
the past, and that dividing my spirit between prayer and the reading of the Holy Scriptures, I may aspire throughout my earthly course to that life where vicissitudes veer not and vices vex not, where prelacy oppresses not and domination dooms and damns not, where there is quiet and peace everlasting and light unfailing, where joys are true, knowing no turmoil or sadness, world without end. And may your pious and placable Paternity prosper in the Lord for many a year, to be a blessing to many and a hurt to few….  

The *De Rebus a se Gestis* includes Hubert’s reply to this letter in chapter vi. In his curt response, Hubert expressed approval of Gerald’s life of study: “…that you now devote yourself to the study of the Holy Scriptures and that from henceforth you have resolved thus wholly to devote yourself, I commend you…”

Book III, chapter x of the *De Rebus* is of particular significance to Gerald’s incessant claims that he had retreated entirely into study at Lincoln. This is the last chapter in which Gerald mentioned his retreat to Lincoln. It begins with two letters from the canons of St. David’s to Gerald, both of which implore his aid. The first letter draws a line under Gerald’s absence from Wales, “Thus far we have spoken together by letters and messengers; but henceforth necessity demands that we should speak face to face… as soon as you have received these letters, you should come to your Church, putting aside all other occasion and excuse…” The second letter from the chapter preserves an explicit date, a rarity in the *De Rebus a se Gestis*. According to that letter, the chapter had received correspondence from Gerald on 21 December (of 1198) and from King

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196 Butler, p. 137; *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I*, pp. 101-102.

Richard “about Christmas.” The canons implored their archdeacon to send them “petitions to the Lord King or to the Justiciar, drawn in such terms as you know to be fit.” They expected Gerald to draft these legal documents and send them along in time for their next general chapter, to be held on January 14, “the day after the feast of St. Hilary.”

This correspondence is important for several reasons. First of all, it establishes that, for the purpose of transacting ecclesiastical and political business, Lincoln was less remote from southwestern Wales than one might otherwise have suspected. The chapter of St. David’s, located on the west coast of Wales, could send a letter to Gerald after Christmas with the full expectation of receiving not only a response, but a set of carefully drafted legal documents, by January 14th.

Of equal significance is the fact that Gerald used these letters to justify reversing his earlier position, repeated incessantly in the De Rebus, that he did not want to be a bishop. He claimed that until he received this correspondence he had no intention of abandoning Lincoln and his life of study, but that:

…from these letters it is clear how great was then their desire that he sooner than any other should be their Shepherd. And when he heard these things and turned them over in his mind, considering that he owed no less to his own poor Church than if he were Canon or Archdeacon of the richest, he came to London on the appointed day a little before Lent.

Finally, it is of some significance that Gerald’s trip to London in 1199 to assist his fellow canons, which he also recorded in chapter x, is the first record in the De Rebus a

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198 Butler, p. 151; Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I, p. 107.

199 Butler, p. 152  Gerald elaborated upon his motivations in chapter xiii, pp. 156-7.
se Gestis of Gerald’s having left Lincoln since 1196. In chapter xii, when he recorded his return to St. David’s following the London meeting, Gerald was sure to write that “he had not seen for many years” Mynyw and St. David’s. The impression that Gerald sought to give in the De Rebus from Book III chapter iii to Book III chapter x was that once he arrived in Lincoln he was absorbed in study and did not leave for nearly three years. At the very least, this is as misleading as Gerald’s description of his curial career – and it may have been a deliberate falsehood.

Gerald’s Departure from Court Reconsidered

In the De Rebus a se Gestis, Gerald constructed a rhetorically satisfying narrative for the years 1191-1199 according to which his own last act as a courtier was a principled refusal to accept the see of Llandaff from the hand of a prince. Upon his righteous resignation from the court, Gerald accepted the rebuke of a pious anchorite and retreated into study. Letters Gerald collected in his Symbolum Electorum prove that he departed the court much later than he implied in his strategically vague De Rebus account. Gerald probably left the royal service in 1194, not, as the De Rebus implies, around late 1191. Furthermore, Gerald abandoned the life of the courtier not out of religious conviction but for the less edifying reason that his career had been sabotaged by the intriguing of a rival.

To establish when and why Gerald actually left the Plantagenet service, it is first necessary to introduce one of his bitterest enemies, a Cistercian abbot named William Wibert. Because William Wibert is one of the principal subjects of chapter four, I will

200 Butler, p. 155; Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I, p. 111.
treat him only briefly here. Gerald’s detestation of Wibert was lifelong; the manifold evils of this monk were the subjects of two letters Gerald preserved in the *Symbolum Electorum*, he revisited this material in a chapter of his 1215 work, the *Speculum Ecclesie*. The two letters preserved in the *Symbolum Electorum* provide the best evidence. Gerald composed Letter I sometime around 1194; it is a long denunciation of William Wibert addressed to William’s superiors in the Cistercian order, the abbots of Citeaux and Garendon. Gerald wrote Letter XXVIII in part to explain to Archbishop Hubert Walter why he had denounced Wibert.; it was written in late 1198, and contains new information about Wibert’s scheming at court years earlier. In the *De Rebus*, Gerald made only vague references to William Wibert, none of which were in the context of his own retirement from court. Nevertheless, Gerald did refer the reader of the *De Rebus* to Letter I of the *Symbolum Electorum*: “But if any would read the letters of the Archdeacon against William Wibert, which he sent to the Abbot of Citeaux, and the letters which he received in reply, let him turn to the book entitled *Symbolum*.

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202 Gerald never wrote about William Wibert at any length in the *De Rebus a se Gestis*. When he did allude to Wibert in the *De Rebus*, it was either to remind the reader that William was Archbishop Hubert Walter’s creature and that the abbot’s deposition was the cause of strife between Hubert and himself (*Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I*, pp. 95-96; 102), or to allude to Wibert’s plotting with Bishop Peter as the reason that he opposed selecting bishops from among the regular clergy (*Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I*, p. 103).
In the letter to the abbots of Cîteaux and Garendon, Gerald gave an account of his enemy’s sordid public career. William Wibert had been a cellarer at the abbey of Biddlesden until he was caught embezzling money and was removed from office by visiting abbots. William had told his fellow monks that he had been repaying a sum his monastery had borrowed from Aaron the Jew; in fact, the loan had long since been repaid and William was pocketing the money. Once deposed from the office of cellarer, the disgraced monk took up the life of a courtier; or as Gerald put it, “driven by his sins, he discovered the court.” Upon his arrival at court, Wibert weaseled his way into Gerald’s entourage and served in that capacity over the course of three embassies Gerald made to Wales from 1192-1193. Gerald claimed that he had been incautious and, rather than keeping his distance from William, went to considerable trouble on his behalf: “Thus his duplicity – indeed multiplicity – deceived my simplicity, and applying to the queen that he might be sent with me, I actually obtained stipends of two marks which were given to him.” Rather than maintaining himself on the stipend Gerald had procured for him, Wibert chiseled more money out of his new benefactor over the course of their

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203 Butler, p. 147; “Qui vero litteras domini archidiaconi contra Willelmum Wibertum abbati Cisterciensi missas et literas repensorias legere voluerit, qui Symbolum Electorum inscribitur, libellum quærat.” *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I*, p. 103.

204 *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I*, p. 207.

205 *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I*, p. 204.

206 “Sic ergo tandem mean simplicitatem eius duplicitas immo multiplicitas circumvenit, et erga reginam ut mecum mitteretur, stipendiis etiam duarum marcarum eidem datis impetravi.” *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I*, p. 204.
diplomatic tours. At some point during his curial service, Wibert utilized the patronage power of the court to have himself made abbot of Biddlesden. After obtaining this prize, however, Wibert remained in the royal service rather than returning to his abbey.

According to Letter XXVIII of the *Symbolum Electorum*, Wibert had used the opportunity presented by these embassies to Wales to enter into a plot with Peter de Leia, the bishop of St. David’s. The details of this plot allow us both to date Gerald’s departure from court more accurately and to better understand how his curial career came to its unhappy conclusion. To contextualize the plot, it is helpful to establish a timeline. In Letter I, Gerald claimed he first met William Wibert after already having spent three years “at the court of the Queen of England and the Mother of the King.” In the next sentence, Gerald recorded that he was sent on embassy to the Lord Rhys in Wales on the order of “the queen and the justiciar” and that Wibert had accompanied Gerald on this embassy. Gerald had served the Plantagenet monarchy since he had been called to court by Henry II in 1184. Therefore, the implication of Letter I of the *Symbolum Electorum* is clearly that Gerald met William Wibert not three years into his own service to the Crown, but about three years into the regency government that ruled England in the absence of Richard I. King Richard had left England for crusade on 12 December 1189.

207 *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I*, p. 209.


209 *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I*, p. 300.

210 *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I*, p. 203.

Therefore, the first embassy Gerald made to Wales that included William Wibert must have occurred some time late in 1192. Gerald recorded having made two further embassies into Wales with Wibert in his entourage.\textsuperscript{212} While this alone would seem to push Gerald’s resignation back another year, Letter XVIII provides better evidence that Gerald remained in the royal service until at least late 1193.

In Letter XVIII of the \textit{Symbolum Electorum}, Gerald outlined to Hubert Walter an ambitious scheme Wibert had hatched, years earlier, with Peter de Leia, bishop of St. David’s. Gerald claimed that while Wibert was still working with him, the monk had told Bishop Peter that he could use his influence at court to have Peter translated from St. David’s, a relatively poor see, to the very wealthy see of Worcester: “then vacant, as luck would have it.”\textsuperscript{213} After he used his influence to accomplish Peter’s translation, Wibert, in turn, would be elected to the newly vacant see of St. David’s. The only obstacle to William’s plan was Gerald. The archdeacon of Brecon was well-regarded at St. David’s and would have been the natural choice to replace Peter. To remove Gerald as the principle obstacle to his scheme, William Wibert set out to destroy Gerald by slandering him before the great men of the court.\textsuperscript{214}

The see of Worcester fell vacant in the summer of 1193, when Robert fitz Ralph died.\textsuperscript{215} If Wibert slandered Gerald pursuant to the scheme he had hatched with Peter de

\textsuperscript{212} \textit{Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I}, p. 204

\textsuperscript{213} “tunc forte vacantem” \textit{Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I}, p. 300.

\textsuperscript{214} \textit{Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I}, pp. 299-300.

Leia, his whisper campaign against Gerald cannot have begun until after Bishop Robert’s death in summer of 1193 had left Worcester *sede vacante*. Furthermore, such a whisper campaign would take time before it had any effect. Therefore, Gerald was unlikely to have withdrawn from court before late 1193 or 1194.\(^{216}\)

The details of this plot not only date Gerald’s departure from court more precisely than does the *De Rebus*, they also makes nonsense out of the idea that Gerald departed the royal service on principle. In Letter I of the *Symbolum Electorum*, Gerald described how Wibert set about destroying him. Upon the return of their embassy to England, Wibert told important men at court that Gerald ought “in no way to be sent to Wales without some prudent man… from their own side.”\(^{217}\) Gerald described how Wibert used his Welsh kinsmen as a mark against him: “He said I was born in these parts and I am also related by blood to the princes of the land, and if he had not watched me closely, I would have completely subverted my orders.”\(^{218}\) Finally, Wibert accused Gerald of treason. “And so he asserted that because the Welsh had besieged a castle, it had been invested by my contrivance, and should anything bad happen on the March, it had been

\(^{216}\) Both Robert Bartlett and Michael Richter have agreed on 1194 as the rough date for Gerald’s departure from court, although Richter has speculated in a footnote that perhaps Gerald left as late as 1195. Bartlett, pp. 18; 58, n. 1; Richter, pp. 6; 96 n. 18.

\(^{217}\) “…me nullatenus ad Wallias absque aliquo prudenti mecum a latere ipsorum directo…” *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I*, p. 204.

\(^{218}\) “Eram enim de partibus illis oriundus et principibus quoque terrae illius consanguinitate conjunctus, cunctaque nobis injuncta nisi me arctius observasset, me pervertisse dicebat…” *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I*, p. 204.
brought forth by my instigation.”219 According to Gerald, Wibert’s whisper campaign brought his years of curial work to nothing and “damaged my heretofore undamaged reputation and credit… with incomparable loss.”220

Gerald had good reason for keeping the De Rebus vague where it concerned the last years of his royal service. Upon the death of Henry II in July of 1189, the Lord Rhys of Deheubarth had gone into revolt. In the campaigning seasons of 1190, 1192, and 1193 Rhys had added to his conquests at the expense of allies of the King of England.221 Gerald’s last years of service to the crown were focused on implementing royal policy in Wales; his diplomatic embassies to Rhys’s court from 1192-1193 were undertaken to counter the effects of Rhys’s successful campaigns.222 There cannot have been any way to conform these missions to the pro-Welsh posture Gerald first adopted in 1199, and which he maintained when he re-interpreted his life story in the De Rebus a se Gestis between 1208-1216. Surely this is why Gerald wrote nothing about these missions in the De Rebus and instead crafted his narrative to suggest that he had left the court years earlier. Furthermore, Gerald’s heroic self-presentation in the De Rebus a se Gestis would hardly have been enhanced by admitting that his curial career ended because of the

219 “Castellum itaque quod Walenses obsederant, mea obsessum asseruit machinatione; et quicquid mali in Marchia acciderat, me fuisse instigante protractum.” Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I, p. 205.

220 “…incomparabili damno famam meam et opinionem eatenus illaesam…” Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I, p. 205.

221 Lloyd, p. 153.

222 Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I, p. 204.
intriguing of a member of his entourage. The narrative of spiritual transition Gerald concocted to paper over the failure of his curial career is much more edifying - better that the hero of the *De Rebus* should denounce the vanity of the court, and, following his visit to a pious anchorite, renounce the pomps of the world in favor of theological study.

Furthermore, it may very well be that Gerald’s curial career was not undone by a malicious monk alone – Gerald’s own bad judgment may have played a role. While both Robert Bartlett and Michael Richter have accepted that Wibert damaged Gerald’s prospects at court, each has speculated that Gerald’s fall from favor may be attributable to more than just Wibert’s slanders. These informed speculations are significant because neither theory is at all compatible with the claim Gerald made in the *De Rebus* that his departure from the court was a result of an idealistic change of life.

Michael Richter has attributed Gerald’s failure at court to the imprudent partisanship he expressed on behalf of Geoffrey Plantagenet in one of his lesser-known works, the *Vita Galfridi Archiepiscopi Eboracensis*. The *Vita Galfridi* is a manichean account of the life and myriad struggles of Henry II’s impossible bastard Geoffrey “Plantagenet” (d. 1212). A quick review of Geoffrey’s biography makes it very clear why Gerald’s partisanship on his behalf was imprudent. While King Henry lived, Geoffrey served his father loyally. His military leadership in the north of England during the 1173-1174 revolt helped preserve Henry’s throne. The king wanted to reward this loyalty with a post in the church. Because this reward would effectively end his prospect of inheriting the throne, Geoffrey put off for over a decade the evil day of his ordination.

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to higher orders. Indeed he remained elect of Lincoln for eight years without ever
bothering to be ordained a priest, never mind consecrated a bishop. In 1181, the pope
told him he had to be ordained and consecrated immediately or resign; Geoffrey resigned
and Henry made his son chancellor.224

Very early in his reign, King Richard I corralled Geoffrey into ordination,
exerting all his power to confine his half-brother in the golden prison of the archbishopric
of York. Geoffrey was not appeased. His unlawful return to England during Richard’s
absence on crusade provoked an disproportionate response from justiciar William
Longchamp. On September 18, 1191 his men seized, bound, and imprisoned Geoffrey at
Dover. Memories of Becket inflamed the hatred of Longchamp already smoldering in the
barony; his justiciarship collapsed. Unfortunately, Geoffrey was far better at playing the
heel than the hero; by the end of his life he had managed to alienate his own chapter at
York, ensure the implacable hostility of two successive royal half-brothers, and
exasperate even Pope Innocent III.225 Richter explained why Gerald was unwise to
become a partisan of Geoffrey:

To take Geoffrey of York as the hero of a treatise amounted to the condemnation
of those people who opposed him vigorously, and most of them were the trusted
servants of King Richard. In praising Geoffrey, Giraldus condemned others in a
very outspoken manner, in particular two men: the justiciar William of
Longchamp and the bishop of Salisbury and future archbishop Hubert Walter.226

224 D. L. Douie, “Archbishop Geoffrey Plantagenet and the Chapter of York,” St


226 Richter, Giraldus Cambrensis p. 89.
English magnates may have hated Longchamp, but their king did not. Worse still for Gerald were his imprudent words about Hubert Walter. Throughout his reign, Richard trusted no one more than Hubert Walter; upon Richard’s death, John found that he also required the expertise of this most capable curial prelate. From his consecration as archbishop of Canterbury in November 1193 until his death in 1205, Hubert’s authority in England was exceeded only by the king’s.

Robert Bartlett has speculated that in addition to the Wibert incident, Gerald’s fall from favor at court may have resulted from his offering some kind of assistance to John during his 1193-4 revolt against his captured brother. Gerald’s claim that John had offered him the see of Llandaff, (vacant from late 1191 to late 1193), would certainly suggest that he was present at John’s court at least some of that time; Bartlett has characterized Gerald as one of John’s familiares.227 Most of the mercenaries who served John during his revolt against Richard were recruited from Wales.228 It can never be proven that Gerald did or did not take John’s part in 1193-4. However, Bartlett was not indulging in idle speculation when he wrote that “the fact that Gerald’s retirement from court followed shortly after John’s unsuccessful rebellion and Richard’s return from captivity in 1194 may not be entirely coincidental.”229

227 Bartlett, p. 65.


229 Bartlett, p. 65.
Gerald’s Retreat into Study Reconsidered

Gerald’s account of his departure from Plantagenet service in the *De Rebus a se Gestis* is deceptive and self-serving. The clear implication of the chapters that follow—that once Gerald had retreated into study at Lincoln he had remained there, cut off from the political and ecclesiastical affairs of Wales—is equally deceptive and self-serving. Indeed what we learn from Gerald’s correspondence about the events of 1197 calls into question the reliability of the *De Rebus* for these years. Far from being cut off from Wales and absorbed in the study of theology, Gerald became entangled in a series of unedifying events in 1197 and 1198 that could not have served to enhance his post-1199 posture as a champion of the native Welsh. And yet, in the *De Rebus a se Gestis* this series of events, which culminated in the gruesome post-mortem flogging of Gerald’s cousin Rhys and the plundering of Gerald’s prebend at Mathry by his kinsmen, is passed over in total silence.

While Gerald did his best in the *De Rebus* to create the impression that his retreat into a life of theological study at Lincoln followed immediately upon his departure from court, this was almost certainly not the case. William de Vere, bishop of Hereford from 1186-1198, and patron of learned men, conferred a prebend upon Gerald some time in the mid-nineties.\(^{230}\) Julia Barrow has suggested that Gerald may have stayed at Hereford around this time.\(^{231}\) Michael Richter has dated this likely Hereford residency to 1194-

\(^{230}\) Gerald recorded losing the prebend in 1202. *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera III*, p. 237.

Barrow explained the utility of a Hereford prebend to Gerald:

Gerald was anxious… to have preferment in England as well as Wales. He spent much time in Lincoln and must have wanted above all to have a prebend there, for Lincoln prebends were valuable and the cathedral was a center of learning; but he was also fond of Hereford, which was conveniently situated on the way between Saint David’s and Lincoln, and which had attracted several scholars, particularly in the quadrivium.

Hereford was located very close to the Welsh march, however, and to acknowledge that he spent time at Hereford between his retirement from the court and his residency at Lincoln would not have suited the heroic narrative of retreat and renunciation Gerald crafted for the *De Rebus a se Gestis*.

By his strategic placement of the Wechelen story in the narrative of the *De Rebus* - between his denunciation of the life of the courtier and his move to Lincoln - Gerald sought to draw an implicit parallel between Wechelen’s anchoritic vocation and his own embrace of theological study. However, Gerald’s move to Lincoln was hardly a retreat into isolation or obscurity. The city of Lincoln was one of the richest in medieval England. “Ermine Street,” the important north/south route through England that connected London to York, ran through Lincoln; her elite were exceptionally well-informed and well-connected. This is particularly true of the clergy of Lincoln Cathedral, who presided over perhaps the richest secular see in England. Alongside Salisbury and

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233 Barrow, p. 186.

Wells, Lincoln boasted the largest secular chapter of any cathedral in England.\textsuperscript{235} After York, her individual prebends were the richest in income.\textsuperscript{236} St Hugh, the bishop of Lincoln during Gerald’s 1196-1199 period of study, went to great pains during his episcopacy to attract learned men from all over to the see.\textsuperscript{237}

Gerald’s evasions concerning when he departed for Lincoln pale in comparison to the absolute silence of the \textit{De Rebus a se Gestis} concerning the tumultuous events in southwestern Wales in 1197. While it is true that the narrative arc of the \textit{De Rebus} is “teleological” and concerned primarily with the St. David’s controversy, the events of 1197 were hardly insignificant to the diocese of St. David’s or marginal to Gerald’s public career. Despite the rhetoric of retreat and renunciation with which Gerald introduced his period of theological study at Lincoln, evidence from letters collected in the \textit{Symbolum Electorum} proves that the archdeacon of Brecon never withdrew from the incessant squabbling between factions of the chapter of St. David’s and their foreign, absentee bishop. This squabbling, in turn, ensnared Gerald in the turmoil of Welsh politics.

The \textit{De Rebus a se Gestis} implies that once Gerald arrived at Lincoln in 1196 he did not abandon his life of study until a little before Lent in 1198. To sustain this


\textsuperscript{236} Edwards, \textit{The English Secular Cathedrals in the Middle Ages}, p. 33.

impression, Gerald had to pass over any correspondence with the chapter of St. David’s before late 1198 in total silence. This is not insignificant; throughout the *De Rebus* Gerald was pleased to copy into the work correspondence and other documentation that enhanced his personal reputation or his political or ecclesiastical arguments. And yet, Gerald not only failed to mention the tumultuous events of southern Wales c. 1196-8, he also excluded correspondence with his chapter that he preserved elsewhere. Evidence from this same period derived from three letters collected in the *Symbolum Electorum* informs us that throughout his supposed retreat into theological study, Gerald was minutely involved in the ecclesiastical squabbling at St. David’s.\(^{238}\) This is not to suggest Gerald never went to Lincoln, but it is important that the reader of the *De Rebus* not allow himself to be deceived by Gerald’s presentation of these years. He did not retreat directly from the life of a courtier into self-imposed isolation.

In *Giraldus Cambrensis: The Growth of the Welsh Nation*, Michael Richter performed the painstaking work of trying to comprehend these obscure squabbles.\(^{239}\) He concluded that, as a result of Bishop Peter’s removal of Gerald as his diocesan representative in the preceding decade, the relationship between the two men had probably become permanently strained as early as 1183.\(^{240}\) By the 1190’s, Gerald’s public criticism of the bishop’s many faults, chief among them his absenteeism, seems to have intensified. A letter of Gerald’s which does not survive was apparently so caustic

\(^{238}\) *Symbolum Electorum* Ep. xxix, xxx, xxi; *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I*, pp. 307-334.

\(^{239}\) Richter, *Giraldus Cambrensis*, pp. 90-94.

\(^{240}\) Richter, *Giraldus Cambrensis*, p. 94.
that Peter demanded Gerald publicly retract it; Gerald refused. Bishop Peter’s response to a hostile faction in the chapter of St. David’s was to engage in “chapter-packing” by bringing in more English canons. To further weaken his enemies, Peter began to reassign prebends from his opponents to his supporters; when he did this to Gerald, the archdeacon of Brecon appealed against his bishop to Rome.

In 1197 the ecclesiastical disunity between Peter and Gerald thrust Gerald into a much more serious political crisis. In 1196, the Lord Rhys had rebelled for the final time against Richard I and his marcher allies in Wales. In early 1197, Peter de Leia made an attempt to bring Rhys into negotiations with the Crown. Rhys must have perceived the bishop’s efforts as meddling on Richard’s behalf. According to the Winchester Annalist:

Peter, bishop of Menevia approached Rhys, King of Wales begging him out of paternal affection not to disturb the peace of the church of God and the saints and of his lord the king of England. But accomplishing nothing concerning this, the bishop, insulted and aggrieved, withdrew from the curia. However, the following night, unfaithful sons sent by the king made off with the bishop, dressed only in his night clothes to cover himself, and so hurrying all this time they dragged him, half naked, irreverently through the woods near his house to their lord, until he was snatched away by a band of men of William de Braose. But in the morning, the bishop, having summoned his archdeacons and the priests of the whole diocese, and joined by them, struck the king and likewise the king's sons along with all the land with his anathema - and he died under the chains of anathema not many days after this. However, Gruffydd, a little easier going than his father, approached the bishop with his brothers and friends, begging for mercy with tears, promising all appropriate subjection and respect and promising to present himself to his lord, the king of England. Having beaten the now stinking body of the dead king, and having beaten his sons also, the bishop, under this agreement, absolved with the dead the living and their land, with the assent and by the authority of the


242 *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I*, pp. 308-9.

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lord archbishop of Canterbury.\textsuperscript{243} In Letter xxxi of the *Symbolum Electorum*, Gerald claimed that Bishop Peter, having excommunicated Rhys and his sons, covered himself with the native Welsh by attributing his harsh sentence entirely to Gerald’s advice: “He intimated to Rhys and to his sons… that they had been excommunicated at my suggestion.”\textsuperscript{244} Gerald wrote bitterly of the result: “For this reason Rhys and his sons pursued me with such hatred that they placed my prebend of Mathry outside their truce, and caused it to be destroyed and pillaged.”\textsuperscript{245} Michael Richter accepted Gerald’s version of these events, writing “as it


\textsuperscript{244} “Reso vero et filiis eius per se ac suos intimavit, quod per me et ad suggestionem meam excommunicati fuerint.” *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera* I, p. 332.

\textsuperscript{245} Unde Resus et filii sui tanto me sunt odio prosecuti, quod prebendam meam de Martriu extra treugas suas... posuerunt, eamque destrui et depraedari fecerunt.” *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera* I, p. 332.
turned out later, the bishop spread the rumor that it was Giraldus who had given the advice to excommunicate the prince…”

Richter also stated flatly that “Giraldus had been present” at the synod which had resulted in Rhys’s excommunication.

I allow that it is quite possible that Gerald attended this synod. I am certain that, even if he never physically departed Lincoln, Gerald could have corresponded fairly rapidly with the chapter regarding the outrage against their bishop. Gerald’s surviving correspondence with his chapter indicates that while he was studying theology in Lincoln he was not only keenly aware of what was going on in his home diocese, but willing to assert himself into the minutiae of local ecclesiastical affairs.

If Gerald did advise Bishop Peter to excommunicate Rhys, it should not surprise us that documentation has not survived. Even if Gerald compiled the *Symbolum Electorum* before his election in 1199, it was probably imprudent for him to have included in his selected correspondence any evidence that he had given such advice. After all, his lands had been pillaged and could be again; the event would have been less than two years old and the wounds still fresh. After Gerald’s 1199 election to the see of

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246 Richter, *Giraldus Cambrensis*, p. 93.

247 I have been unable to ascertain why Richter was so certain that Gerald was physically present at this 1197 synod. Richter did not footnote this statement. I assume he reached this conclusion based on letter xxxi of the *Symbolum Electorum*, the long and rambling diatribe Gerald wrote to the chapter of St. David’s remonstrating with them about the wrongs he had suffered at the hands of the bishop and of the faction of the chapter sympathetic to Peter de Leia. However, this letter does not seem to proceed chronologically and I am uncomfortable drawing the same affirmative conclusion from it. See: Richter, *Giraldus Cambrensis*, p. 93.

248 Please see pp. 78-9.
St. David’s, his increasingly pro-native Welsh public posture would have made such advice extremely embarrassing - especially in light of his own criticism of Hubert Walter’s practice of excommunicating Welsh rebels. Therefore, the fact that no documentary evidence survives is no reason to assume that Gerald did not advise Bishop Peter to excommunicate Rhys in 1197.

Indeed, while Gerald claimed that Bishop Peter falsely attributed the excommunication of Rhys and his sons to his advice, it is not at all difficult to imagine that Gerald – even if he had remained at Lincoln over the entire course of the dispute - had advocated precisely this course of action. In ecclesiastical politics, Gerald was an arch-Gregorian. He so lionized Thomas Becket that he made the martyred archbishop the standard by which other church hierarchs ought to be measured.249 Despite the fact that Gerald knew Geoffrey of York was no candidate for sainthood, he expressed outrage over the rough treatment the archbishop of York received at the hands of the justiciar’s men in September of 1191.250 Such vehemence flowed out of Gerald’s convictions about the position of the church and of bishops in society; it owed nothing to any private notion of Geoffrey’s particular holiness. As much as Gerald hated Bishop Peter de Leia, as incompetent and malicious as he believed him to be, Peter was still the Lord’s anointed. It is hard to imagine that Gerald would not have demanded the excommunication of anyone who abducted a bishop in the middle of the night and ran him half-naked through the forest. In light of this evidence, I think it is very likely that Gerald – either in person

249 Bartlett, p. 76.

250 Giraldi Cambrensis Opera IV, p. 388.
or by correspondence - did advise his bishop to excommunicate Rhys. Gerald could not have known, in 1197, that less than three years later he would be denouncing the archbishop of Canterbury before the pope for using excommunication as a tool to suppress the revolts of the native Welsh.

Furthermore, the behavior of Rhys and his sons must be taken into consideration. By all accounts, Rhys was very shrewd. He knew Gerald well. It seems unlikely that his sons would have pillaged Gerald’s prebend at Mathry had they perceived the archdeacon as a former courtier now removed from public affairs. For Rhys and his sons to have believed that their excommunication had resulted from Gerald’s advice, they must have perceived Gerald as a man who, in 1197, continued to be an important actor in the ecclesiastical and political life of southern Wales.

Gerald’s bitterness, in the aftermath of these terrible events, was not limited to Peter de Leia or to the sons of Rhys who had despoiled his lands. In a letter to Rome appealing Peter de Leia’s reassignment of some of his benefices to another canon, Gerald vented his spleen upon all the native Welsh. He wrote that Bishop Peter was “of course a truly barbarous bishop, prelate of a barbarous region, and making use of barbarous ways in the customary manner…”\textsuperscript{251} While Gerald was able to spin his resignation from the Plantagenet court into a dramatic, indeed a spiritual episode in the \textit{De Rebus a se Gestis}, no rhetorical sleight of hand could have redeemed this terrible falling out with his native

\textsuperscript{251} “… episcopum scilicet vere barbarum, barbarae regionis antistitem, et barbaris moribus more solito utentem…” \textit{Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I}, p. 308. See also: Richter, \textit{Giraldus Cambrensis}, p. 93.
Welsh cousins or his temporary emotional alienation from the Welsh in general.

Furthermore, an important component of Gerald’s legal strategy during the St. David’s case was to excoriate the archbishop of Canterbury for making use of excommunication as a tool in suppressing native Welsh uprisings; Gerald placed this argument at the heart of his oration before the pope in winter of 1200. To remind readers of the De Rebus a se Gestis that he could himself be implicated in such a use of excommunication would have compromised Gerald’s self-presentation as the ecclesiastical champion of the Welsh. For this reason, Gerald emphasized his absence from Wales during 1197 and in so doing passed over in total silence the excommunication death, and posthumous flogging of his most prominent native Welsh kinsman. Indeed, while the deaths of Henry II and Richard I are carefully observed in the De Rebus a se Gestis, the Lord Rhys – Gerald’s own cousin - simply disappears from the narrative without any explanation.

The Painscastle Disaster

It is important to understand what was happening in Wales during the years 1197-1198 – the very years that Gerald, in the De Rebus a se Gestis, chose to pass over in a discrete silence. The ritual flogging of Rhys’s stinking corpse makes a fine metaphor for the abject failure of all the posthumous arrangements this formidable prince had made to ensure peace and stability in Deheubarth. In the years immediately following Rhys’s death, political leadership of the native Welsh passed to Powys, the principality to the

252 Please see Chapter Four, pp. 238-9; 242-4.
northeast of Deheubarth.

For most of his life, Rhys had been pre-eminent among all the native Welsh leaders. After his death on 28 April 1197, Deheubarth faltered at the hands of Rhys’s competing sons. The legitimate son Rhys had designated to be his heir, Gruffydd (d. 1201), could not overcome the ambitions of his illegitimate brother, Maelgwyn (d. 1230). The first time Gruffydd fell into Maelgwyn’s hands, Maelgwyn traded him away to Gwenwynwyn of Powys - who in turn handed Rhys’s designated heir over to the English in exchange for a castle. This state of disorder in Deheubarth allowed the prince of Powys to put himself forward as the pre-eminent prince of the native Welsh. Indeed, Gwenwynwyn often allied himself with Maelgwyn against his legitimate kinsmen in order to exacerbate Deheubarth’s internal divisions. The prince of Powys never realized Rhys’s exalted position in Pura Wallia, however. The rising of the Welsh that Gwenwynwyn orchestrated in the aftermath of Rhys’s death ended in disaster at Painscastle just over a year later.

The military defeat at Painscastle on August 13, 1198 was a terrible setback for the native Welsh not because they were unaccustomed to violence and bloodshed, but because of the sheer magnitude of their losses. Violence was endemic in Wales, not only between the marchers and the native Welsh, but also between the native Welsh and Flemish colonists and among the Welsh themselves. The native Welsh elite observed no principle of primogeniture. This incitement to dynastic violence was compounded by a

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253 Lloyd, p. 159.

254 Davies, 229.
peculiar system of foster-parentage in which boys of the ruling warrior caste were raised in households outside their immediate family. When combined with the fluidity of the boundaries between the greater and lesser Welsh principalities, this network of competing loyalties led to a stunning level of personal aristocratic violence. The incursions into Wales and then the steady conquest of large sections of southern Wales by Norman lords which began soon after their 1066 conquest of England exponentially increased this violence.

The *Brut Y Tywysogyon*, or *Chronicle of the Princes*, is a translation into Welsh of a Latin chronicle that was itself probably compiled in the late thirteenth century in the Cistercian abbey of Strata Florida.255 Because the *Brut* was composed in southern Wales, most of the mayhem it records took place in that region; it probably underreports the violence for Wales as a whole. And yet, the level of conflict recorded in the chronicle is remarkable. For the twelve years leading up to the battle at Painscastle, the *Brut* records, by my count, five assassinations, seven violent raids into settlements or towns, three incidents of Welsh princes being deprived of their eyes, and eighteen sieges (successful and unsuccessful).256 It is important to note that this twelve-year period encompasses two uprisings of the Lord Rhys of Deheubarth. Most historians believe that Rhys had enjoyed a stable relationship with king Henry II, but that after Henry’s 1189 death he pursued a

255 *Brut*, xii.

256 *Brut*, pp. 171-183.
policy of expansion at the expense of the absent Richard I.\textsuperscript{257} From 1189 through the early 1190’s Rhys carried out a successful series of campaigns against Plantagenet authority. Rhys was so successful that his Welsh supporters “…began to be embarrassed by their success… they had taken more castles than they could defend.”\textsuperscript{258} From 1196 until his death in April of 1197, Rhys waged his last campaign against the Crown and the marcher lords with similar success.

Despite these two uprisings and a harrowing record of sieges, raids, and eye-gougings, however, the Brut records only one pitched battle between January of 1186 and July of 1198. In 1196, Rhys gathered an army assembled from the princes subject to him in South Wales. After successfully burning Carmarthen and the castle at Colwyn, he sacked and burned the de Braose stronghold of Radnor. The Brut records the battle between Rhys and marcher allies of the de Braose family which followed the action at Radnor:

Roger Mortimer and Hugh de Sai drew up their forces equipped with horses and corselets and helmets and shields without warning against the Welsh. And when great-hearted Rhys saw this, like a fierce lion he armed himself with a stout heart and a strong hand, and he attacked his enemies manfully and turned them to flight, and pursued them and treated them vilely, although manfully, so that the Marchers greatly lamented the exceeding great slaughter of their men.\textsuperscript{259}

J. E. Lloyd reckoned the battle a significant setback for the marcher lords involved,


\textsuperscript{258} Lloyd, 153.

\textsuperscript{259} Brut, p. 177.
writing that “forty of the knights and a multitude of foot soldiers were cut down.”

The evidence of the *Brut*, that raiding, plundering, and assassinations were all carried out by the Welsh in preference to pitched battles, is consistent with what Gerald observed in the *Descriptio Kambriae*. According to Gerald, the Welsh “live on plunder.” While intimidating in an initial attack, they usually faltered in the open field: “Their sole idea of tactics is either to pursue their opponents, or else to run away from them. They are lightly armed and they rely more on their agility than on brute strength, It follows that they cannot meet the enemy on equal terms, or fight violently for very long, or strive hand-to-hand for victory.” This exasperated Gerald. In a section of the *Descriptio* dedicated to advising the Welsh how to resist conquest, he predicted a better outcome “if the Welsh would only adopt the French way of arming themselves, if they would fight in ordered ranks instead of leaping about all over the place...” And yet, Gerald understood the strengths of the Welsh warrior; he described for his day the timeless tactics poor mountain people employ against the numbers and riches of empires:

> Although beaten today and shamefully put to flight with much slaughter, tomorrow they march out again, no whit dejected by their defeat or their losses. They may not shine in open combat and in fixed formation, but they harass the enemy by their ambushes and their night-attacks. In a single battle they are easily beaten, but they are difficult to conquer in a long war, for they are not troubled by hunger or cold, fighting does not seem to tire them, they do not lose heart when things go wrong, and after one defeat they are ready to fight again and to face

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261 *Description*, p. 257; *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera VI*, p. 207.


263 *Description*, p. 273; *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera VI*, p. 226.
once more the hazard of war.\textsuperscript{264}

One of the reasons that the battle outside Painscastle was such a disaster was that on August 13, 1198, the Welsh made the mistake of trying to stand and fight against a force arrayed in “the French way.”\textsuperscript{265} The battle was the culmination of a rising led by the prince of Powys, Gwenwynwyn ab Owain Cyfeiliog (d. 1216). Gwenwynwyn had chafed against the decades-long accommodationist position of his father, Owain Cyfeiliog (c.1130-1197). In 1197, upon the deaths of both his father and Rhys, Gwenwynwyn intensified a revolt he had already begun in an attempt to succeed the Prince of Deheubarth as the pre-eminent leader of the native Welsh; he invested Painscastle in late July, 1198.

Painscastle constituted a particular provocation to the native Welsh. Originally constructed in the 1130’s by a marcher lord, it had been assailed and taken over by the Welsh soon thereafter. In 1195 the aggressive de Braose family took it from a local Welsh ruler and reinforced it as a link between their holdings in Brecon and in Radnor.\textsuperscript{266} Painscastle had fallen to the Lord Rhys in 1196 during his last campaign, but in the negotiations which followed he had returned it to the de Braose family. Gwenwynwyn, then, had both symbolic and strategic reasons to invest it.


\textsuperscript{266} Lloyd, p. 159; Gerald was probably referring to this reinforcement of the structure by the de Braose family when he mistakenly wrote that Painscastle had been “built a short time before” the 1198 battle. Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I, p. 90.
Photograph 1: Painscastle. The earthworks are all that remain of Painscastle; in this photograph they rise above the grain shed of an operating farm in the small village of the same name in Powys, Wales. (author’s photograph)
Photograph 2: Battlefield. According to local tradition, this is the field where the Welsh force besieging Painscastle was crushed by the army of the justiciar of England. The field is less than a quarter mile from the Painscastle earthworks. (author’s photograph)
The *Brut* describes Gwenwynwyn’s ill-fated siege:

In that year Gwenwynwyn planned to restore to the Welsh their ancient dignity and their ancient proprietary rights and their bounds. And after all the princes of Wales had agreed with him upon that, he gathered a mighty host and went to lay siege to Painscastle; and after having laid siege to it for nearly three weeks he did not know the future issue. And when the Saxons learned that, they released Gruffudd ap Rhys, who was with them in prison, and they gathered the might of England along with him with the intention of making peace with the Welsh. But then the Welsh would not accept peace form the Saxons; but after taking the castle they threatened to burn the towns and to carry off their spoils. And the Saxons, not suffering that, attacked them, and in the first battle they drove them to flight, making an immense slaughter of them. And then Anarawd ab [Einion and] Owain ap Cadwallon and Rhiddid ap Iestyn and Rhodri ap Hywel were slain, and Maradedd ap Cynan was captured and imprisoned. And so the Saxons came back joyful with victory, enriched with the spoils of the Welsh.\(^{267}\)

The *Chronica de Wallia* was derived in large measure from the same common manuscript, now lost, as the *Brut*.\(^ {268}\) It offers a more dramatic account of the Painscastle calamity:

During this year Gwenwynwyn proposed to restore the Welsh to their former dignity and to restore the Marches to their rightful owners, These had earlier been lost through the many sins of their owners. About 22 July with the support of all the forces of all the princes of Wales he amassed a grand army. These united and they besieged Painscastle for three weeks with the greatest relish, although they were without warlike siege engines. In fact they were ignorant and not prepared for the wretched outcome of their undertaking. The English were struck with terror on learning of this attack and so they released Gruffydd ap Rhys, who they were then holding in shackles, and all Englishmen united together in strength. Thus when the Welsh were offered peace if they gave up all their efforts, themselves truly from sin persisted in being no friend to the English nation and would not assent to their petition, but declared that after the said castle had been taken they intended to burn everything and take all the possessions of the English. The English thus not divining this as prophetic, and not wishing to endure this, instantly made an attack and in the first onslaught drove the poor people into flight, capturing some and slitting the throats of others like sheep; and so this

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\(^{267}\) *Brut*, pp. 181-183.

unheard of massacre and unaccustomed killing occurred… And so the English returned home rich in spoils as well as in the death of their enemies.\textsuperscript{269}

Two aspects of these chronicle accounts of the Painscastle disaster are of particular significance. The first is the magnitude of the defeat. This Welsh force was no raiding party; it was not limited to Gwenwynwyn’s \textit{teulu}, or princely war-band. He commanded a combined force of warriors delegated from all three major principalities of Wales: Deheubarth, Gwynedd, and Powys. When the English expedition gained the upper hand, this substantial force did not manage to melt into the hills to fight another day. As a result, in one action the army of the justiciar was able not only to relieve Painscastle, but to crush a general rising of the native Welsh. While neither Welsh chronicle numbers the casualties, both imply that they were very high. By comparing Welsh soldiers to sheep at the slaughter, the \textit{Chronica de Wallia} betrays the magnitude of this “unheard of massacre and unaccustomed killing.”\textsuperscript{270} The chronicle of the Abbey of St. Werburg at Chester numbered the Welsh casualties at Painscastle at four thousand.\textsuperscript{271} Gerald estimated the Welsh losses at “about three thousand.”\textsuperscript{272} Even allowing for the exaggeration and unreliability inherent in statistics offered by medieval writers, the battle clearly bordered on a massacre. Indeed in a letter to Gerald, Hubert Walter acknowledged that despite all this bloodletting the English force did not lose a single

\textsuperscript{269} \textit{Ann. Cam.}, p. 104.

\textsuperscript{270} \textit{Ann. Cam.}, p. 104.

\textsuperscript{271} \textit{Annales Cestrienses, or The Chronicle of the Abbey of S. Werburg at Chester}, ed. Richard Copley Christie (London: Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, 1887), ca. 1198, p. 42.

\textsuperscript{272} \textit{De Invect.}, p. 92.
According to both Lloyd and Davies, the disaster was significant enough that the balance of power in native Wales shifted permanently from Gwenwynwyn of Powys toward Llywelyn ab Iorwerth, prince of the northern principality of Gwynedd.274

The second notable aspect of these chronicle accounts of Painscastle is the absence of both Wechelen the anchorite and the “woman disguised as a nun.” According to these chronicle accounts, the English were motivated to attack the Welsh force out of a fear that once Painscastle fell, the Welsh would raid into English territory. The *Chronica de Wallia* attributes the English decision to attack to the warlike disposition of the Welsh during negotiations. Indeed the author seems censorious of the Welsh, attributing their stubbornness during the pre-battle negotiations to their sins. In the Wechelen story, Gerald claimed that the Welsh believed a rumor to the effect that a local ascetical holy man had encouraged the English attack. We might expect an echo of such a singular rumor in a chronicle whose author was inclined to blame the disaster on the sins of the losing side. In the next chapter I will demonstrate how unlikely it was that anyone would have believed such a rumor.


274 Lloyd, p. 160; Davies p. 229.
Chapter 2: The Exoteric Reading of the Wechelen Story

The key to my reinterpretation of the De Rebus a se Gestis is what I have called the “Wechelen story.” Gerald’s account of his visit to Wechelen, the anchorite of Llowes is found in Book III, chapter 2. In the introduction to this study, the Wechelen story is reproduced in its entirety in both Latin and English, but a brief overview is helpful. In section I of the Wechelen story, Gerald claimed to have visited an anchorite in the northern part of his archdeaconry of Brecon at Llowes, in Elfael. This anchorite, called Wechelen, approved Gerald’s plan to leave the world and study theology; he even offered an edifying rebuke to the effect that rather than merely knowing the theological precepts Gerald planned to study, he ought to strive to keep them. In the second section, Gerald claimed that this anchorite was miraculously, albeit ungrammatically, granted the ability to understand Latin. In section III, Wechelen denounced a rumor current in Wales which held that he had advised the army of the justiciar of England to attack the native Welsh force that had been besieging nearby Painscastle. Instead, it is suggested that the Devil sent a woman disguised as a nun to encourage the English attack, and that this woman – an angel of Satan – claimed her aggressive counsel came from Wechelen. In the fourth

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275 Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I, pp. 89-93. “Wecheleu” in Latin has been rendered both “Wechelen” and “Wecheleu” in English. Following H. E. Butler, the translator of the De Rebus a se Gestis, I have preferred “Wechelen.”
section, Gerald advised Wechelen to ignore advice from certain Cistercian monks and to continue bestowing miraculous healings through his cell window.

Because the exoteric reading of the story, albeit with the miraculous aspects bracketed or rationalized, has been the dominant interpretation among historians, the purpose of this chapter will be to discredit the Wechelen story as an account of a literal historical episode. Having proposed a reinterpretation of the *De Rebus a se Gestis* which is largely dependent upon an esoteric reading of the Wechelen story, it is incumbent upon me first to discredit as evidence of a literal historical event the heretofore universally accepted exoteric reading. It is my contention that if the esoteric interpretation of the Wechelen passage is more historically credible than the exoteric reading, a new understanding of the *De Rebus a se Gestis* must replace the old.

I will begin this chapter by reviewing the historical consensus concerning the Wechelen story. Historians have cited the Wechelen story as documentary evidence of Welsh eremitism, of the nature of the church in Wales, and even of the informal acquisition of Latin. While some historians have bracketed or rationalized Wechelen’s supernatural acquisition of Latin, all who have cited the Wechelen story have accepted that there was an anchorite named Wechelen and that Gerald visited this pious solitary to receive spiritual counsel.

I will acknowledge that this widespread acceptance of the Wechelen story is understandable: Gerald meant for most readers to understand the story literally. Indeed Gerald went to a great deal of trouble to conform the first two sections of the Wechelen story - the anchorite’s pious rebuke of his archdeacon and his miraculous acquisition of the Latin tongue – to the pious expectations of his contemporaries. I will compare these
two incidents in the Wechelen story with similar incidents in the vitae of contemporary solitaries, such as Wulfric of Haselbury and Godric of Finchale. By examining Gerald’s literary works, particularly the Gemma Ecclesiastica (c. 1199), I will establish Gerald’s extensive knowledge of hagiographic topoi and his sensitivity to the pious expectations of his contemporaries.\textsuperscript{276} A brief review of his hagiographic work further confirms that Gerald was an author keen to meet the religious expectations of his readers.

And yet, I will argue, the many ascetic solitaries present in Gerald’s literary works represent his authorial sensitivity to the expectations of contemporary readers rather than any pious devotion of his own. A careful examination of Gerald’s writings reveals that however conscious he was of his contemporaries’ enthusiasm for hermits and anchorites, he likely did not share that enthusiasm. What we can learn of Gerald’s personal piety from the Topographia Hibernica, the Speculum Duorum, the Speculum Ecclesie, and the Epistola ad Stephanum Langton, sources which together span the full range of Gerald’s career, ought to make us doubt seriously whether Gerald would have

\textsuperscript{276} There is some terminological inexactitude in the medieval sources between hermit (eremita/heremita) and anchorite (inclusus/anachoreta/anachorita). The solitary nature of both vocations seems to have caused them to be perceived as more alike than different. Most hagiographic tropes which applied to the hermit applied also to the anchorite. I will use the term “anchorite” for a recluse walled into his cell and “hermit” for a solitary living in retreat from the world but not walled into a cell; I will employ the general term “solitary” to refer to both vocations. Please see Giles Constable, The Reformation of the Twelfth Century, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 10; Janet Burton, “The Eremitical Tradition and the Development of Post-Conquest Religious Life in Northern England” in Eternal Values in Medieval Life, ed. Nicole Crossley-Holland, (Lampeter, Wales: Trivium, 1991), p. 19; Ann K. Warren, Anchorites and their Patrons in Medieval England, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), pp 7-8.
consulted any ascetic solitary for spiritual advice, never mind one who was only partially literate.

I will conclude this chapter by subjecting the Painscastle section of the Wechelen story to severe scrutiny. In this most intriguing section of the Wechelen story, Gerald failed to sustain the careful deployment of pious conventions that marks the first half of the story. Furthermore, he asks the reader to accept that the native Welsh, who had four generations’ experience fighting the English, would have believed that an army of the king’s justiciar advanced into battle because the commanders had followed the advice of a woman bearing the message of an anchorite. Having demonstrated the near impossibility - even with the supernatural elements having been bracketed - of reading Painscastle section of the story as a literal account of that historical event, I will have set the stage for the esoteric reading of the Wechelen story presented the following chapters.

The Wechelen Story: Historical Interpretations

Allowing for some subtlety of interpretation, every antiquarian and historian who has cited the Wechelen story has treated it as evidence of a literal historical event. That is to say, historians interested in Gerald himself, the Welsh church, eremitism, and even language and literacy, have all cited this story of a pious visit to an anchorite as if it actually happened. J. S. Brewer, editor of the first three *Rolls Series* volumes of Gerald’s works, wrote that Wechelen was one to “whose discretion in spiritual matters [Gerald] was inclined to pay unusual deference.”²⁷⁷ Having described Gerald’s tearful visit to the

²⁷⁷ *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera* I, p. liv.
anchorite and Wechelen’s miraculous Latinity, (those sections of the Wechelen story I have labeled “I” and “II”), Brewer concluded:

This anchorite, whose imperfect Latinity probably found its parallel among others of the same class in the secluded districts of England and Wales, entertained for Giraldus a sincere affection. Their intercourse forms one of the most pleasing features in the diffusive and rambling narrative of our author’s troubles, disappointments, contentions; a simple and affecting picture of the primitive manners of the times. He was one of the very few real friends which men of the temper of our author are destined to find in this life. As the archdeacon came to take leave of him, and beg his prayers on his studies, that he might understand the Word of life, the hermit, grasping tightly the archdeacon’s hand, “Och! Och!!” he replied, “say not understand, but keep; for the one is of no avail without the other.” The archdeacon burst into tears at the rebuke, which he considered as an oracle from God. But drying his tears and collecting his books, Giraldus set out on the road to Paris, fully resolved, in his own strong language, to devote not a few hours, but the rest of his life to study.”

The historians responsible for the two most authoritative modern surveys of medieval Wales have both accepted the Wechelen story as characteristic evidence of nature of the Welsh church. John Edward Lloyd, author of the two volume *History of Wales from the Earliest Time to the Edwardian Conquest*, wrote:

… the holy man consulted by the British clergy before they went to their second conference with Augustine is represented six centuries later by Wechelen, the hermit of Llowes in Elfael, who was regarded by the whole countryside as a prophet and a healer of the sick and whose guidance and ghostly counsel were sought, poor and illiterate though he was, by so considerable a person as Giraldus Cambrensis.

In *The Age of Conquest: Wales 1063-1415*, a survey of later medieval Wales meant in part to update and revise Lloyd’s work, R. R. Davies’ also accepted the Wechelen story

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278 *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I*, pp. lv-lvi.

as contemporary evidence of eremitism in Wales:

Contemporaries indeed conceded that native Wales was not without its excellencies in the practice of religion. Most notable were its hermits, living either individually, as did Wechelen, the hermit of Llowes in Elfael, consulted by Gerald of Wales, or in communities, as did the culdees in the religious houses of north Wales, such as Beddgelert (Arfon), Enlli (Bardsey Island), and Ynys Lannog (Priestholm in Anglesey). Welsh law accorded a special status to such men (W. diofrydigion), not dissimilar to that of holy men and anchorites in other societies. Their word had an especial force in oath-taking and they frequently acted as mediators in local disputes… Even Gerald of Wales was forced to concede that “nowhere will you find hermits and anchorites of greater spirituality than in Wales.”

In his monograph *The Monastic Order in South Wales, 1066-1349*, F. G. Cowley employed the Wechelen story to illustrate the widespread presence of religious solitaries in Wales:

The hermit still retained his traditional place in Welsh religious life, unaffected by the waxing and waning of religious institutions. Records of their activities are rare and the prevalence of their way of life is attested by place names and tributes to the hermit ideal in Welsh poetry rather than by formal accounts of their work. … the anchorite of Newgale and Wechelen, the hermit of Llowes in Elfael (both friends of Gerald of Wales), lived alone but had frequent contacts with visitors who valued them for their spiritual counsel and their powers of healing and prophecy. Wechelen was semi-literate, but seems to have been able to speak and write a sort of pigeon-Latin using undeclined nouns and only the infinitives of verbs.

Despite its bizarre organization and lack of modern citations, Rotha Mary Clay’s survey *The Hermits and Anchorites of England* is still an authoritative survey of medieval solitaries. Clay included Wechelen in her chapter on “Literary Hermits,” calling him “a

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280 Davies, p. 179.

curious illustration of [a] general lack of learning” among some solitaries.\textsuperscript{282} Clay related the story of Wechelen’s miraculous acquisition of Latin, then described his role as Gerald’s counselor: “Although not skilled in Latinity, the anchorite of Llowes was the friend and adviser of the learned archdeacon of Brecknock, who, before retiring to a life of study, went to seek his approval and blessing.”\textsuperscript{283} In her work on eremitism, Janet Burton cited Wechelen as an example of “the vitality of the hermit life in Wales.”\textsuperscript{284}

Indeed, Gerald made the Wechelen story sufficiently convincing that historians of literacy have cited his account of the anchorite’s miraculous acquisition of Latin. In \textit{From Memory to Written Record}, M. T. Clanchy wrote:

> Although cases can be found of Latin being learned without formal instruction, they are exceptions which prove the rule that it was difficult. Gerald of Wales has a story about hermit, Wecheleu, whom he met near the river Wye in c. 1193, who had acquired Latin miraculously while on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. He used only infinitives and substantives, explaining to Gerald that “the Lord who gave me the Latin tongue, gave it not me by way of grammar and cases, but only that I might be understood and understand other.” In Wales, of course, the language problem was even more complex than in England, and a man like Gerald needed to know some Welsh as well as Latin, French, and English.\textsuperscript{285}

In \textit{System}, a linguistics journal, Mark Atherton elaborated on the notion that the Wechelen story provides us with evidence of the informal acquisition of Latin: “The idea


\textsuperscript{283} Rotha Mary Clay, \textit{The Hermits and Anchorites of England}, p. 170.


that Latin could be subconsciously acquired seems to have been foreign to the period…

Rare instances of self-taught Latin speakers occur, but they were considered to be examples of miraculous acquisition, as in the case of the hermit Wecheleu…”

While he ignored the Wechelen story in his monograph on the St. David’s controversy, Michael Richter cited it twice in his sociolinguistic researches. In an article on the use of Latin by the clergy, Richter cited the Wechelen story as evidence of the difficulty of learning Latin informally: “Few people were as fortunate as Wecheleu, the welsh anchorite from Llowes who received the gift of the Latin language from God, albeit incompletely, because he could speak only in infinitives.”

In his monograph *Sprache und Gesellschaft in England im 12. Jahrhundert*, Richter wrote:

Of his Welsh mother tongue we hear only the exclamation, “Och, Och,” but Giraldus reported in detail how Wechelen had acquired the Latin language, and he tried to make use of the exact words of the hermit himself. Wechelen spoke in the infinitive and only inadequately mastered case endings; Gerald’s sensitive and realistic account shows him at the peak of his narrative art.... It hardly plays a role that Gerald’s narrative style does not exactly hold up and that, in the course of the episode, the recluse actually does use verb endings and that case endings occur constantly throughout. The important fact in our context is that Wechelen carried on a conversation in the Latin language with Gerald and also with his priest. It should also be emphasized that he, before this enlightenment happened to him, felt his lack of knowledge a deficiency because he could not fully participate in the church service.  

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288 Michael Richter, *Sprache und Gesellschaft in England im 12. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart, Anton Hiersemann, 1979), pp. 79-80. The above is my translation of the following:
Gerald’s claim that he, the archdeacon of Brecon, had not only visited an anchorite for counsel but also meekly submitted to his rebuke would not have been shocking to contemporaries. Gerald was not the only person of importance to be “much chastised and brought to tears” by an ascetic solitary. Men and women of importance in the twelfth century did indeed consult anchorites and hermits for advice, and the counsel they received was not always gentle. Heroic ascetics such as hermits and anchorites were thought to have a spiritual authority which transcended their social origins. Naturally, hagiography offers the richest examples of such deference to spiritual authority, but even chronicles reflect intense enthusiasm for solitary ascetics.

“Von seiner walisischen Mittersprache hören wir nur den Ausruf, >Och, och<, aber Giraldus berichtet ausführlich, wie Wecheleu die lateinische Sprache erworben hatte, und er versuchte, sich exakt der Worte des Eremiten selbst zu bedienen. Wecheleu sprach in Infinitiven und beherrschte Kasusendungen nur unzureichend; Giralds feinfühliger und realistischer Bericht zeigte ihn auf der Höhe seiner Erzählkunst… Es spiel kaum eine Rolle, daß Giraldus seinen Erzählstil nicht ganz durchhält und daß der Klausner im Laufe des Berichtes tatsächlich Verbendungen benutzte, während Kasusendungen daund vorkommen. Wichtiger ist in unserem Zusammenhang die Tatsache, daß Wecheleu sowohl mit Giraldus als auch mit seinem Priester Gespräche in lateinischer Sprache Führte. Auch sei betont, daß er vor der ihm widerfahrenen Erleuchtung seine fehlenden Lateinkenntnisse als Mangel empfand, weil er nicht voll am Gottesdienst teilnehmen konnte.”

289 *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I*, p. 90.

290 The notice English historians paid to ascetic solitaries can be traced back to Bede’s intense admiration for St. Cuthbert. Twelfth and early thirteenth century chroniclers who demonstrated particular enthusiasm for solitaries include Henry of Huntington, who
five male solitaries of twelfth-century England whose *vitae* are extant, four were said not
only to have offered counsel to their social superiors, but even to have rebuked one or
more of them. Geoffrey of Durham wrote of the hermit Bartholomew of Farne (d. 1193):

[Bartholomew] was wont to rebuke the arrogance of the rich (the news of whose
savagery reached him), whenever they – not without fear - came around. He bore
such great reverence in his face, moreover he was so venerable in appearance, that
by his admonishment not a few of them desired to leave off harming the poor, to
shake their hands free from unlawful service, and to redeem their sins by acts of
charity.  

Other hagiographic accounts were more explicit. John, abbot of Ford from 1191
to 1220, began the De *Vita Beati Wulfrici Anachoretae Haselbergiae* around 1180 and

celebrated Wulfric decades before John of Ford wrote his De *Vita Beati Wulfrici
Anachoretae Haselbergiae*; Gervase of Canterbury, who also mentioned Wulfric;
William of Newburgh, who had been much impressed when he met Godric; the author of
the *Chronicon de Lanercost*; and Roger of Wendover, who praised effusively both
Richard Howlett *Rolls Series* 82 (London: Longman, 1884), pp. 149-150; *Chronicon de
(London: Longman & Co., 1886), pp. 4-9; 65-78.

291 “Divitum, quorum ad ipsum feritatis fama pervenerat, arguere solebat arrogantiam,
nec sine metu quandoque apparebant. Tantum enim reverentiae gerebat in vultu, adeoque
venerabilis erat aspectu; nonnulli eorum eius exhortationibus a laesione pauperum
desistere, a munere illicito manus excutere, eleemosynis peccata studebant redimere.”
Geoffrey of Durham, *Vita Bartholomaei Farnensis* in *Symeonis Monachi Opera Omnia*,
pp. 302-303.
probably finished it in 1185 or 1186.292 His subject, the anchorite Wulfric of Haselbury (d. 1154), was enclosed a few hours’ walk from the Cistercian monastery of Ford in Devonshire. Though literate, Wulfric was not of a distinguished family and served as a parish priest before he was enclosed in his cell. Despite his humble origins, Wulfric fearlessly rebuked his social superiors. Another John, later the abbot of Tintern Abbey, told John of Ford that his conversion from feudal thug to Cistercian monk began as a result of Wulfric’s gentle rebuke.293 When the Empress Matilda visited his cell, Wulfric upbraided her for being rude to a local noblewoman.294 The anchorite reprimanded Agnes, the sister of the Countess of Gloucester, for her half-hearted confession.295 Once, while he prayed for the soul of a newly-deceased monk, Wulfric made his friend and patron, a local lord named William fitz Walter, wait outside his cell. When William dared to send a servant to see if Wulfric was correct in his impossible knowledge of this far-away death, the anchorite rebuked him for his lack of faith.296 King Stephen (c. 1096-1154), toward the end of his disastrous reign, made a royal visit to Wulfric:

Finally coming to him after many rebukes with saving exhortation, he promised King Stephen this (among other things): that he would certainly reign as long as he lived. It ought not to be passed over that, because he squeezed out of the king certain of his own sins, indeed by name so far as this was possible, he exhorted him to do penance, adding until he should repent, it was impossible that his throne

293 De Vita Beati Wulfrici Anachoretæ Haselbergiae, p. 70.
296 De Vita Beati Wulfrici Anachoretæ Haselbergiae, p. 106.
could be strengthened and that peace could be given to things. Having heard these things the king began weeping copiously, and making a confession of his sins, he gave his cheek to the striking and spitting of the prophet.\textsuperscript{297}

Reginald of Durham recorded that Godric of Finchale (c. 1065-1170) had also both advised and reproved his social superiors.\textsuperscript{298} Godric, a man of Anglo-Saxon stock who had made his living as a trader before retiring from the world, was widely known for his heroic asceticism.\textsuperscript{299} This imparted to him charismatic spiritual authority and made him a sought-after counselor. Godric seems to have been particularly tough on men serving in the entourages of important abbots. Ailred (1110-1167), the writer and aristocratic abbot of Rievaulx, once visited Godric to discuss spiritual matters. As Ailred prepared to depart, Godric noticed that one of the abbot’s monks, “a man very well known, once great and honored among the learned and the noble and the rich,” had sat on

\textsuperscript{297} Postremo venienti ad eum regi Stephano post objurgationes plurimas et exhortationes salutiferas hoc inter caetera repromisit quod eum oporteret regnare quoad viveret. Nec id praetereundum quia regem cuiusdam peccati sui quod etiam nomine tenus expressit, paenitentiam agere exhortatus est, adiciens quia [quoadusque] paeniteret impossibile erat firmari solium eius et pacem rebus dari. Quibus auditis rex ubertim flere coepit et, peccati eiusdem confessionem faciens, percutienti et conspuenti prophetae maxillam dedit.” De \textit{Vita Beati Wulfrici Anachoretae Haselbergiae}, pp. 117-118.


the tombstone the hermit had carved for himself.\textsuperscript{300} Godric told Ailred that this was appropriate; the man would soon die because he had so fattened himself with delicacies that he could neither walk without a staff nor get on his horse without help.\textsuperscript{301} At the conclusion of his conference with a different Cistercian abbot, Godric was asked discreetly for counsel by a monk of that abbot’s entourage. The monk claimed he sought Godric’s help for a friend; Godric saw through the ruse and upbraided him:

Lord and father, a certain intimate friend of mine is incessantly and incurably wearied and overwhelmed by the trouble of a serious temptation; he is never allowed a rest by the snare of the devil. For as often as he slips because of turpitude of the body, so often (his) thoughts are set alight by this temptation; from which the death of his spirit can be discerned, unless he could be helped more quickly than this. In short, learning that I might be about to hurry to you, he asked me with many tears in order that I might commend him to your prayers. Hence I beg that for the love of Jesus Christ you might help, and that you might pour out prayers to the lord on account of the suffering of that man. Now the man of God, praying silently, and at length fixing his eyes on him, said “Brother, how long do you want to carry on in such a way, and don’t you ever want to be free of such a foul business? For it is a thing which ought exceedingly to be cursed, so filthy is the sin with which you pollute yourself… To which the other man, dismayed, responded, “Lord, it is another of whom I have spoken, but I am not the one.” To him, the man of God: “Truly, son, you yourself are the one of whom these things are spoken as though of another; for you have become accustomed to pollute yourself in this way and by this sort of misdeed, and so in this way you have not ceased to do this until now.” Describing in detail the manner and sequence, he exposed to him the entire history of his own misery. Now this brother was not able to deny the truth any further, but rather, prostrating himself, he threw himself on the mercy of God. The man of God lifting him up, said,

\\textsuperscript{300} “…vir notissimus et inter doctos et nobiles atque divites quondam magnus et honoratus.” \textit{Libellus de Vita et Miraculis S. Godrici}, p. 176.

\textsuperscript{301} “Ille clientelis multorum hactenus constipatus incessit, et diversi generis delectationibus morituram carnis putredinem saginavit; modo vero nisi baculo sustenante vix pedes ingreditur, et nisi ope aliena in equo non elevatur.” \textit{Libellus de Vita et Miraculis S. Godrici}, p. 176.
“Rise up and with the blessing of God go forth with your abbot…”

Robert of Knaresborough (d. 1218) combined an eremitical vocation with hospital work and other charitable activities. While his parents had been among the better off burghers of York, Robert was by no means an aristocrat. A vita of St. Robert recorded what happened when Brian de l’Isle, a local magnate who admired Robert, brought King John to visit the holy man:

The fame of this man having been heard and disseminated in the land, the illustrious king John, invited by requests from the lord Brian, descended humbly with the count to the cell of Robert. Having entered the little chapel, they discovered the man of God prostrate before the altar in prayers. He did not want to leave off the prayers he had already begun on account of the noisy entrances, nevertheless in the spirit he could discern the ostentatious approach of the king

302 …“domne pater, quidam mei familiaris amicus gravi temptationis molestia continue et desperabiliter fatigatur et opprimitur; et consuetudinis trupitidine devinctus ac devictus, a diaboli laqueis nunquam respirare permittitur. Nam corporali turpitudine toties labitur quoties cogitatione illius temptatione succeditur; unde certa mors animae illius ei imminere dinoscit, nisi illi quam citius subveniat. Comperiens denique quod ad vos profecturus properarem, multis cum lacrimis me rogavit, ut illum vestris orationibus commendarem; quare obsecro ut pro amore Jesu Christi illi subvenias, et pro eius miseria Domino preces effundas.” Tunc vir Dei sub silentio orans, et demum in illum attentius defigens oculos, dixit, “Hiccine, frater, quam diu vis talia perpetrare, et nunquam vis a tam spurca operatione cessare? Nam exsecranda est nimis tam foetida nequitia qua te polluis…” Quibus alter confusus, respondit, “Domne, alius est, de quo locutus sum, sed ego ille non sum.” Ad quem vir Dei, “Vere, fili, tu ipse es qui haec quasi de alio locutus es; nam hoc modo et tali genere facinoris te polluere consuesti, et sic ac sic agere hactenus non destitisti;” prosequensque modum et ordinem, omnem ei miseriae suae exposuit tenorem. Tunc frater ille uterius verum diffiteri non potuit, sed potius procidens Domini misericordiam postulavit, quem vir Dei elevans, ait, “Surge, et cum Dei benedictione cum abbate tuo proficisciere…” Libellus de Vita et Miraculis S. Godrici, pp. 270-271.

himself. Brian, seeing that he was not rising for the king nor showing the reverence due him, said “Brother Robert, get up – hurry. Behold, here is John, the lord our king.” Who forthwith getting up, said to Brian, “Show me which of these is my king.” To which, Brian: “This one here is my king John, illustrious among kings.” Now the man of God, having picked up a certain ear of grain, which he was holding out to the king in his hand, asked: “Are you able, my lord king, to create out of nothing by your own sort of power?” Now certain of those hanging around said: “This man is crazy in the head and the fool discloses this fact himself, evidently and openly.” To these certain men responded, “By no means, but this servant of God is wise and prudent, because he has inside him the indwelling Holy Spirit, in whom is contained all the wisdom of divinity.304

The Wechelen Story: The Anchorite’s Miraculous Latin

While less common than the pious upbraiding of social superiors, the miraculous comprehension of a foreign language, such as Gerald attributed to Wechelen, was not unheard of in contemporary hagiography.305 Such stories were common enough that


John of Ford, in his *Life of St Wulfric*, used it to comic effect. Wulfric’s friend, Brother William, had healed a bilingual man who had become mute. This had brought upon Brother William the enmity of another friend of the anchorite, a priest named Brichtric.

William explained to Wulfric what had happened:

> A dumb man was brought to me, and I prayed to God and placed my hand upon him and behold he spoke plainly and without impediment, not only in English but also in French. When he saw this the priest (Brichtric) was troubled and, unable to restrain his indignation, upbraided me vehemently saying: “Behold, I have served you for so many years and now today I have proved most clearly that I have done it up to now in vain. For to a man who is a foreigner and whose tongue it was quite enough to have unloosed, you have piously given the use of two languages, whilst to me who am compelled to remain dumb in the presence of the bishop and the archdeacon, you have not even given the facility to speak French.”

Twice in his *vita* of Godric of Finchale, Reginald of Durham wrote that the hermit had demonstrated miraculous comprehension and use of Latin. Godric had only a choir-school education, to which he had humbly submitted himself as an adult in order that he might better read the Psalter he had been given. Reginald wrote that some Durham monks were astounded at his ability to teach scripture, despite his illiteracy, and paused during a conversation with Godric to decide which questions to put to him next. Godric surprised them by addressing them in Latin and then answering the questions they had not yet asked:


307 *Libellus de Vita et Miraculis S. Godrici, Heremita de Finchale*, pp. 59-60.
… we began to talk to one another – between ourselves – in Latin, saying each to another what sort of thing we wanted to search out from that man, if indeed we dared. Whereas he, turning himself with a genial look and smiling to us, said, “about these things you seek among yourselves, which you want to investigate,” and he set forth, repeating each thing which we had spoken between ourselves. He omitted nothing of the things which we had proposed investigating. We recognized, therefore, that he knew our words, the Spirit having revealed them…

M. T. Clanchy cited Reginald’s account about Godric’s miraculous Latinity (and another of his ability to understand French) alongside the Wechelen story. Such stories, he argued, indicate the high standards of literacy among the educated and the perceived difficulty of learning languages without formal training:

Reginald revealed his own ignorance of the effects of travel on an intelligent man, when he considered it miraculous that Godric understood “French” or “Romance,” even though his mother tongue was English. Reginald likewise considered that it was the Holy Spirit, rather than his native wit, which enabled Godric to understand the Latin conversation of four monks from Durham, who had been sent to cross examine him… The information provided by Godric’s biographers about his knowledge was not recorded for its own sake, as it was intended as evidence of his religious devotion and of those miraculous powers which were the indispensable sign of a saint… Godric’s life story provides numerous correctives to the modern tendency to assume that schools are the beginning and end of education.  

More significantly, Clanchy wrote that the Wechelen story was analogous to the

Post talia multa conversi ad invicem Latino eloquio inter nos colloqui coepimus, dicentes singuli alterutrum qualia ab illo perquirere optaviums, si tamen id auderemus. At ille se convertens, et jocundo conspectus in nos subridens, ait, “De his inter vos quaeritis quae investigare voluistis, quamvis ea mihi hactenus celaveritis,” replicansque singula quae inter nos dixeramus exposuit, et nihil eorum de quibus percutendi proposuimus intermisit. Cognoviums ergo quod verba nostra, Spiritu revelante, cognoverat, qui et de his quae praemeditati fuimus omnia praeclarissimse disserebat. Unde et spiritum propheticum comperti sumus in eius pectore requiescere, qui nobis sigillatim tam evidenti sermone singula quae praeposuimus potuit enodare.” Libellus de Vita et Miraculis S. Godrici, Heremita de Finchale, p. 180.

Clanchy, From Memory to Written Record, p. 239.
miraculous explanations of Godric’s literacy,

Godric may never have learned to write and his knowledge of Latin depended primarily on hearing and memorizing. Although he could never become *litteratus* by this method, he could evidently cope with the normal uses of Latin in ecclesiastical circles. Gerald of Wales gives an example of another hermit and traveler, Wecheleu, who had likewise miraculously learned Latin by ear. The fact that such knowledge was considered miraculous suggests, however, that Latin was thought difficult to learn without formal instruction in grammar.\(^{310}\)

Indeed Clanchy has argued that Gerald’s brutal deprecation of the learning of two of his enemies, Hubert Walter and the abbot of St. Dogmael’s, is best understood as a reflection of the exalted standards of a Paris schoolman. After all, Hubert’s weak Latinity “did not prevent him from mastering the royal archives.”\(^{311}\)

The Wechelen story has seemed plausible to historians in part because Gerald went to a great deal of trouble to make it plausible to his contemporaries. Gerald was quite conscious of the authority of pious solitaries in his own day; he was well-versed in both the social practices surrounding the ascetic holy man and in the literary tropes utilized to glorify him. Such familiarity is often reflected in Gerald’s writings. Although Gerald never wrote about Wulfric, there is an excellent chance that he had heard stories about the anchorite. The *Vita Wulfrici* was dedicated to archbishop Baldwin. Baldwin had been abbot of Ford and had known John, Wulfric’s hagiographer.\(^{312}\) As archbishop of Canterbury, Baldwin traveled extensively with Gerald in his preaching journey through Wales in 1188. It is certain that Gerald knew a great deal about St. Godric. In

\(^{310}\) Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*, pp. 239-240.

\(^{311}\) Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*, pp. 246.

\(^{312}\) *De Vita Beati Wulfrici Anachoretae Haselbergiae*, p. xvii.
his *Gemma Ecclesiastica*, Gerald openly borrowed a story of Godric’s cold water immersions from Geoffrey of Coldingham’s *Vita Godrici*, writing “…the story is told in his biography, and I tell it here in the same words.”  

Gerald was equally aware of the importance of the pious solitary to the Welsh and of their abundance in Wales. In the citations above, Cowley, Lloyd, and Davies offered Wechelen as an example of what each historian knew was typical of Welsh culture; ascetic solitaries were afforded special legal status, their word was weighted heavily at law, and they served as mediators in disputes. In the *Descriptio Kambriae*, Gerald wrote “Nowhere can you see hermits and anchorites more abstinent and more spiritually committed than in Wales. The Welsh go to extremes in all matters. You may never find anyone worse than a bad Welshman, but you will certainly never find anyone better than a good one.” He repeated this passage verbatim in the prologue of *De Iure et Statu Menevensis Ecclesiae*. Hermits past and present were frequent topics in the *Itinerarium Kambriae*. Gerald told beast stories of the solitary saints Illtud and Caradoc. He associated eremitic virtues with St David, patron of his cathedral. Gerald praised Holy Island, near Anglesey, as an “island inhabited by hermits, who live

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313 Gemma, p. 164; Giraldi Cambrensis Opera II, p. 214.  
314 Description, p. 254; Giraldi Cambrensis Opera VI, p. 204.  
315 Giraldi Cambrensis Opera III, p. 115.  
316 Journey, p. 88; 144; Giraldi Cambrensis Opera VI, pp. 28; 85-86.  
317 Journey, p. 160; Giraldi Cambrensis Opera VI, p. 102.
in the service of God by the labour of their hands.”

Gerald included dozens of stories about pious hermits in his *Gemma Ecclesiastica*, a work composed c. 1197 to instruct the clergy in his Welsh archdeaconry. There is little original material in the *Gemma*; not only does it owe a great debt to Gratian and to Peter the Lombard’s *Sentences*, it also incorporates entire chapters of Peter the Chanter’s *Verbum abbreviatum*. The *Gemma* also borrows from both individual hagiographical works and from collections such as the *Vitae patrum*. What is significant in this case, however, is not that the work is derivative but what Gerald chose to derive. He knew his readership, and many of the exemplars he selected for the edification of Welsh clerics – from St. Paul the first hermit to Godric of Finchale – were holy solitaries.

Indeed, among Gerald’s borrowed tales in the *Gemma* there is a story of the miraculous impartation of language. St. Ephrem, a hermit, asked St. Basil, his bishop, to impart the Greek language to him:

> “I know, O Holy Father, that God will give you whatever you ask. I want you to ask the Lord that I may speak Greek.” The archbishop answered: “You have asked with faith, come, O most esteemed father and master of hermits, let us ask God together. He indeed is able to grant your wish, for it is written: “He will grant the desires of those who fear Him, and He will hear their prayer, and He will come to their aid.” Then they prayed together for a long time. When they arose from prayer, St Basil said: “Why, O lord Ephrem, do you not accept ordination to

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318 *Journey*, p. 190; *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera VI*, p. 131.


320 *Gemma*, p. xxii.
the priesthood? You are worthy of it.” Through his interpreter, St Ephrem replied: Because I am a sinner.” Basil retorted, “Would that I had your sins.” And he continued: “Let us kneel down.” After they knelt down, Basil placed his hand on St. Ephrem’s head and said to him: “Tell us to arise.” And his tongue having been loosed, St Ephrem said in Greek: “Receive us, save us, have mercy on us, and guard us with your grace, O God.” Then was fulfilled what was written: “the blind will leap as deer and the tongues of the mute will be loosed.” And speaking in the Greek language that very hour, they glorified Almighty God Who hears the petitions of those who pray to Him and who have a holy fear of Him.”

Evidence of Gerald’s shrewd consciousness of the effect that discrete types of hagiographic accounts had on particular groups of readers is evident beyond the Gemma Ecclesiastica. This consciousness is a distinctive mark of Gerald the hagiographer. Indeed, he only composed vitae of saints whose particular adherents could advance his fortunes. Gerald penned five hagiographic works, four of which are extant. Julia Barrow believes that Gerald wrote his Life of St Ethelbert at the suggestion of William de Vere, bishop of Hereford from 1186-1198. Hereford hosted a shrine to Ethelbert, who was thought to have been martyred nearby. The cathedral was also the nearest center of learning and scholarship to Gerald’s rural archdeaconry at Brecon, and Gerald held a prebendary there.

Two Geraldine vitae can be connected to Lincoln. Gerald composed the Vita Sancti Remegii sometime during his first residence at Lincoln, between 1196 and 1199. The work evolved into a virtual history of the bishopric intended, no doubt, to please its

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chapter. Indeed in a letter defending the racier material in his *Topographia Hibernica*
from criticisms made by Lincoln’s chancellor William de Monte, Gerald sought to deflect
criticism of his work by reminding William of his *Vita Sancti Remegii.*

Late in life, during a second period of residency at Lincoln, Gerald wrote his *Vita Sancti Hugonis.*

Gerald had been acquainted with St. Hugh; his first period of study at Lincoln had
coincided with the Carthusian’s last years as bishop of the see.

Gerald composed two vitae of Welsh saints. Ironically the *Vita Sancti Davidis,*
which Gerald claimed was written at the request of the chapter of St David’s, was not
useful to him during the 1199-1203 legal controversy.

Gerald’s *Vita Sancti Karadoci* does not survive, but it did play a role in the St. David’s controversy. St. Caradoc was a
beloved hermit saint of some importance to the native Welsh. In the *De Rebus a se
Gestis,* the *De Invectionibus,* and the *De Iure et Statu Menevensis Ecclesiae,* Gerald was
sure to take full credit for the letter he obtained from the pope initiating a formal

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325 Bartlett, p. 217.

326 St. Hugh had a short temper, and during his time as bishop he was well-known for his
impatience with clerical squabbling. It is more than likely that Gerald, by writing a
rancorous letter to Hugh contesting the status of a church at Chesterton, had quite literally

327 Michael Richter has argued that while this *vita* of their patron saint probably pleased
the chapter, some of the material in that work would have been detrimental to Gerald’s
archiepiscopal claims for St David’s. For this reason, it was not among the works Gerald
presented to the Pope. Michael Richter, “The Life of St. David by Giralduis Cambrensis,”
investigation into the sanctity of St Caradoc.\textsuperscript{328}

It is no accident that Gerald composed \textit{vita}e for these two Welsh saints in particular, as both were intimately connected to the prestige of St. David’s. Bishop Bernard (1115-1148), an earlier champion of the metropolitan claims of St David’s, had both searched for the body of St. David and commissioned a \textit{vita} of the saint meant to advance archiepiscopal claims for the see against other Welsh sees.\textsuperscript{329} When St Caradoc died, Bishop Bernard immediately had the body interred at the cathedral “doubtless in the confident hope that in the fullness of time he would be canonized and the cathedral’s status thereby enhanced.” If Gerald could not advance the interests of his see with his \textit{Vita Sancti Davidis}, he could certainly do so by obtaining the canonization of St Caradoc. Better still, he could do this while appealing to the local pride of the Welsh.\textsuperscript{330}

Gerald of Wales and the Solitary Vocations

The evidence above would seem to vindicate the acceptance the Wechelen story has found among historians. It suggests that Gerald had every reason both to make a

\textsuperscript{328} “… archidiaconus… ad papam iterum venines, et commodes ecclesiae suae pro biribus invigilans, literas super beato Karadoco nobili heremita et confessore nostro canonizando et catalogo sanctorum ascribendo, dum tamen de vita ipsius et conversatione primum niquisitio fieret.” \textit{De iure, Giraldi Cambrensis Opera III}, p. 182. See also, \textit{De Rebus, Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I}, p. 7; \textit{De Invect.}, p. 150-151.

\textsuperscript{329} Davies, p. 184.

pious visit to Wechelen and to record such a visit in the *De Rebus a se Gestis*.

Contemporary hagiographic accounts of anchorites and hermits suggest that men of importance were not above visiting humble solitaries, regardless of their social station, because of the religious authority which was thought to attach to their ascetical practices. Linguistic miracles were not unheard of in such accounts, and perhaps bear witness not only to a long literary tradition but to the very real prejudices of the educated – in particular their failure to apprehend a way of learning a language outside of formal education. Certainly the ascetic solitary was the object of particular admiration in the culture and even the law of the native Welsh. Gerald was part Welsh, the seat of his archdeaconry lay in rural Wales, and it is not unreasonable to think that he would have picked up some of the local enthusiasm for this sort of ascetic holy man. Indeed his own comments on Welsh solitaries and his composition of a the *Vita Sancti Karadoci* would seem to indicate that he had.

I believe, however, that the above only constitutes evidence of Gerald’s awareness of the expectations of others; it does not necessarily offer any insight into his own piety or devotional practices. In fact, Gerald’s writings also contain a contrary tendency which seems not only to indicate that he was little given to ascetical practices personally, but also that he was less impressed by them than were many of his contemporaries. It is one thing to tally up the number of pious hermit stories Gerald told when instructing his Welsh clergy - it is quite another to get at his personal views. There is a good deal of contrary evidence in Gerald’s extensive writings suggesting that he was unlikely to have consulted an anchorite before making a life-altering decision. Indeed, by
the end of his life Gerald expressed serious doubt as to the spiritual utility of the eremitic vocation. Evidence from Gerald’s literary productions also suggests that it would have been out of the question for Gerald to defer to an anchorite who lacked education. Training in the trivium was more important to Gerald than any ascetical or contemplative practice.

This is not to suggest that Gerald was of the species of secular cleric who accepted a tonsure to gain learning and advancement, but who practiced his inky profession undisturbed by pangs of priestly or pastoral responsibility. In the De Rebus a se Gestis and elsewhere, Gerald presented himself as a vigorous reformer and student of scripture and there is good reason to accept his self-presentation. Throughout his writings Gerald took a consistently maximalist position towards the power and dignity of the church; consider, for example, his lifelong hero-worship of Thomas Becket.

Gerald’s religious convictions seem best expressed through his devotion to scholarship; his own extensive learning in the scriptures and the church fathers testify to his sincerity. However, Gerald demonstrated almost no evidence of having been impacted by the intense and internal affective piety often associated with the so-called “reformation” of the twelfth century. One looks in vain in Gerald’s writings for the naked-following-the-naked-Christ spirituality of solitaries whose ascetical devotion attracted followers and bloomed into new foundations. The twelfth-century “new hermits” treated by Harriet

331 In the De Rebus a se Gestis, Gerald recorded that when he had run out of money and was besieged by creditors during his second stay in Paris, he had implored the aid of the saint at his shrine in Rheims. Gerald also recorded that he wore a Becket medal. Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I, pp, 49; 53.
Leyser in *Hermits and the New Monasticism*, men such as Robert of Arbrissel (d. 1116), Stephen of Obazine (d. 1154), and Gilbert of Sempringham (d. 1190), do not seem to have made much of an impression on Gerald.\(^{332}\) St. Gilbert made a brief appearance in the *Gemma Ecclesiastica*, but only because his proximity to the opposite sex offered Gerald an opportunity to harangue his readers about the dangers of women and the importance of chastity.\(^{333}\) Robert Bartlett wrote of Gerald’s spiritual outlook that he:

…was prone to pomposity and, like most vain people, humourless. He took himself very seriously, and had no sense of proportion when others did not. This earnestness about himself was matched by a certain authoritarianism in his religion. It is sometimes difficult to remember that Gerald died only a few years before St. Francis. The saint’s spirituality, with its emphasis upon feeling, its interiority, and its sense of pathos, stands worlds apart from Gerald’s hard and formal religion. Indeed, not only was Gerald very far away from Franciscan feeling, he also seems to have been untouched by the “humanizing” elements of twelfth-century spirituality - spiritual friendship (*amicitia*), and a new warmth and delicacy in devotion. His God was a judge and lord, not a father, let alone a friend. His writings stressed God’s power and inscrutability. Gerald in some ways, exhibited a “pre-twelfth century” spirituality.\(^{334}\)

Bartlett also commented on Gerald’s rigorous view of the subjection of the body and his horror of sexual intercourse – and by extension, of women: “This stern picture of God was accompanied by a great rigour towards the body. His polemics against clerical incontinence and his pervasive anti-feminism have an angriness of tone that suggests his own need for control. Some passages in the *Gemma Ecclesiastica* exhibit a violent


\(^{333}\) *Gemma*, p. 188; *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera II*, p. 247.

\(^{334}\) Bartlett, p. 211.
loathing for the body and physical processes.” This might seem to make the anchorite - an ascetic walled away from the world, given over to heroic fasting, and physically inaccessible to women - a perfect counselor for a rigid man such as Gerald. Fear of pollution, however, is not the same thing as enthusiasm for asceticism.

Indeed there is little evidence that renunciation of any sort played a part in Gerald’s religious life. Evidence from his two most personal works, the *Speculum Duorum* and the *De Rebus a se Gestis*, makes it abundantly clear that he had not forsworn material possessions. In the *Speculum Duorum*, Gerald admitted that he had “great treasures” and was “very wealthy and rich.” In fact, the *Speculum Duorum* is itself a book-length diatribe against two men, Gerald’s nephew and William, the young man’s tutor, which was occasioned by their swindling Gerald out of a considerable portion of his fortune. In the same work Gerald wrote that he carried around an expensive Lombard sword. In spite of his clerical status and hierarchical dignity, Gerald openly boasted that he had used this sword to save the life of his ungrateful nephew’s tutor. Throughout his life he owned a large library, and he wrote that it was a particular goal of his to secure the sort of patronage that might allow him to expand it. Gerald claimed that when he had served as a court chaplain to Henry II he had employed several followers; certainly his description of his baggage during that period suggests something of the magnificence

335 Bartlett, p. 212.
338 *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I*, p. 87.
of the courtier.\footnote{Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I, pp. 80-82.}

If Gerald was not willing to surrender his possessions, neither was he particularly interested in turning the other cheek. Late in life, having been provoked by his nephew’s treachery, he wrote of his own spiritual condition to the Prior of Llanthony: “we have not set out so far on the road of such great perfection that we cannot be distressed by such great, such obvious, such continual injustice.”\footnote{Spec. Duo., Ep. VII, p. 253.} Perhaps even this confessional language was more a stereotyped expression of correct sentiment than an outpouring of genuine feeling; Gerald used similar words in his speech before the pope in defense of his character and in other correspondence.\footnote{Spec. Duo., Ep. II, p. 163; De Invect., p. 89.} However, in this letter to the Prior of Llanthony, Gerald expounded upon this sentiment in a way which may offer genuine insight into his spiritual condition:

But we wish we were not seeking revenge but could bear it all calmly to such an extent that when we were smitten on one cheek, we would immediately turn the other, not returning evil for evil, and endeavoring not to be overcome by evil, but rather to overcome evil by good. However, we have heard this teaching of the apostle quite often, but we have not had the strength to reach this absolute perfection; for we cling to an old imperfection and anyone who has robbed us we consider an enemy. We still love our friends, and hate our enemies, especially when they have plundered us incessantly and irrevocably.\footnote{Spec. Duo., Ep. VII, p. 261.}

Could a lack of material renunciation in his own life have increased Gerald’s enthusiasm for those holy men who had renounced possessions? Such was often the case
for his rich and powerful contemporaries. I offered several examples above of the wealthy and powerful seeking out the counsel of ascetic solitaries. Even Gerald’s great adversary Hubert Walter, archbishop of Canterbury, papal legate, justiciar of England, and a man of conspicuous magnificence, sought such counsel. Because of a dispute with the Carthusian house of Witham over pasturage, the archbishop found himself having to visit the monastery in person; while he was there, he asked to meet with the prior, Adam of Dryburgh. Adam had once been a Premonstratensian abbot, but he had transferred to the more austere Carthusian order. Hubert was so moved by Adam’s simplicity that he not only removed his lordly vestments and confessed to Adam, he even allowed himself to be scourged. After this first meeting, Hubert twice prevailed upon Adam to come into his presence. On the second occasion, when Adam had to sail to the Continent to attend the chapter general of the Carthusians, Hubert insisted that the prior sail on his vessel. Hubert and Adam spent the entire voyage discussing spiritual matters. Hubert Walter never renounced wealth and power, no contemporary would ever have mistaken him for a saint, and yet the example of a man who did move the archbishop mightily.

Not so with Gerald. While he filled the Gemma Ecclesiastica with examples of heroic asceticism and holy solitaries, it is important to remember that Gerald wrote the Gemma to edify the Welsh clergy committed to his archidiaconal oversight. Gerald was

343 “One thing on which all sources agree was that Hubert Walter’s manner of living was unusually extravagant even for an archbishop.” Young, 165.

aware of contemporary enthusiasm for hermits, especially among the Welsh, and so he formed this work accordingly. Other passages in Gerald’s writings, however, betray a suspicion of rigorous asceticism in general and of the solitary life in particular. In the *Topography of Ireland*, Gerald attributed the “enormities” and “abominations” of Irish Christians to the asceticism of their clerics.\(^{345}\) He wrote,

…they are pastors that wish to be fed, and do not wish to feed. They are prelates that do not wish to be of use, but rather to use… The prelates of this land, keeping themselves according to an old custom within the enclosures of their churches, give themselves almost always to contemplation alone. They are so enamored of the beauty of Rachel that they find the blear-eyed Leah disgusting. Whence it happens that they neither preach the word of the Lord to the people, nor tell them of their sins, nor extirpate vices from the flock committed to them, nor instill virtues… They care for and are mindful of themselves only, but they omit or put off with great negligence the care of the flock committed to them.\(^{346}\)

In the *Speculum Ecclesie*, Gerald told the story of a visit he enjoyed with Serlo of Wilton (d. 1181).\(^{347}\) Gerald and Serlo had been friends in their student days, when Serlo had been a poet. Serlo had since become a monk, taking first a black habit, then departing the Cluniacs for the more rigorous Cistercian order. As a Cistercian, he had become abbot of L'Aumône. Gerald recorded that he was disturbed by his friend’s appearance: “I asked whether it was due to excessive abstinence and immoderate mortification of the flesh that he had now become so lean and wasted.”\(^{348}\) Serlo replied, to Gerald’s evident relief, that he had arrived at his current physical condition not by

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\(^{346}\) *Topography of Ireland*, pp. 113-114.

\(^{347}\) *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera, IV*, p. 104.

\(^{348}\) Butler, p. 79.
fasting and mortification, but as a result of a violent fall from a horse! In the same work, Gerald also boasted of how, while celebrating Christmas at the board of the Bishop of Hereford, he had goaded two Cistercians into breaking their own rule and eating meat.\textsuperscript{349}

It should be no surprise then, that Gerald repaired to the educated and eminent for spiritual guidance, not to men who had embraced radical poverty. Evidence from the \textit{Symbolum Electorum} suggests that his spiritual advisor in the 1190’s was Roger, the prior of Llanthony.\textsuperscript{350} While Gerald included a letter in the \textit{Symbolum Electorum} praising the renunciation of worldly pursuits in favor of theological studies, his correspondent was the infamous satirist and courtier Walter Map - hardly an unlettered recluse.\textsuperscript{351} In 1206, when Gerald seems to have become troubled by his flagrant pluralism and his less-than-canonical bestowal of the archdeaconry of Brecon on his nephew, he made a strategic act of renunciation. During a penitential pilgrimage to Rome, in imitation of his hero Thomas Becket, Gerald theatrically resigned his possessions into the keeping of Pope Innocent III.\textsuperscript{352} The shrewd pope, who had considerable experience of Gerald from the archdeacon’s legal wrangle of 1199-1203, knew the part he was to play. The pontiff handed Gerald’s possessions back with his blessing. Based on this encounter, Gerald later claimed that the maneuver by which he had preserved the archdeaconry of Brecon

\textsuperscript{350} \textit{Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I}, pp. 245-248.  
\textsuperscript{351} \textit{Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I}, pp. 271-289.  
\textsuperscript{352} \textit{Spec. Duo.}, pp. xxxii-xxxiii
within his family “was not disapproved by the pope himself.”

The apparent enthusiasm for religious solitaries that Gerald displayed in some of his writings must be balanced not only against his own non-ascetical religious practices and views, but also against a pointed critique he wrote of the solitary vocations. This critique was addressed to Archbishop Stephen Langton, a prelate Gerald admired and from whom he seems to have harbored some hope of gaining patronage. Between 1215-16, Gerald dedicated to Archbishop Stephen Langton the De Iure et Statu Menevensis Ecclesie and the second edition of the Descriptio Kambriae. Richard Kay has argued that Gerald presented the Speculum Ecclesie to Langton in the Fall of 1215, just before the prelate departed for the fourth Lateran Council. Gerald likely wrote his critique, contained in the Epistola ad Stephanum Langton, around the same time. Gerald was prompted to write the Epistola because he had heard an alarming rumor to the effect that Langton might, “… once and for all choose out for yourself some solitude wherein to lead the life of an anchorite or hermit, or seek even the austerity of a Carthusian prison.” After reviewing the excellences of Langton’s reign in the see of Canterbury and warning him against deserting his flock, Gerald continued:


For your wise and pious discretion knows right well which are dearer to Christ; most excellent prelates or hermits wandering alone and anchorites shut up within their cells. The former rule, the latter are ruled; the former feed their flock, the latter are fed, so that the recluse is to the prelate as the flock to its shepherd. Prelates restore to God with great increase the talents that have been committed to their care and cease not to win souls, for which Christ laid down his life; but the recluse, intent only on their own salvation, hide the talent committed to them. The prelates bring rich harvest to the granaries of God, true grains of wheat, not husks of chaff; but those others live solitary and alone and do nought to multiply God’s harvest. [Therefore, in the cultivation of the vine of Christ, did not Bishop Basil accomplish more and far more than the hermit Macharius? Indeed is not Pope Gregory, excellent doctor and apostle of the English greater than either Paul the first hermit or Anthony, though indeed each life is notable for sanctity? Therefore, granted that the contemplative life, as you know, might appear safer and much more tranquil, yet the active life is far more useful, and for that reason more turbulent and more glorious, because it brings many to salvation and brings forth great riches in Christ.”

It is true that some of the vehemence of Gerald’s rhetoric may reflect his alarm over the rumor that the archbishop had considered retiring. Stephan Langton approached Gerald’s archiepiscopal ideal; he was an intellectual and a theologian of the Paris schools who had stood up to a Plantagenet king. Much of this letter is dedicated to praising the episcopal

office at the expense of the contemplative vocations in an effort to dissuade Langton from leaving Canterbury. Even taking this into account, however, the vehemence with which Gerald denigrated the solitary vocations is striking.\(^{357}\)

Finally, even were the above all to be dismissed, the Wechelen story strains our credulity because it is hard to imagine that Gerald would have gone to anyone deficient in learning for spiritual or vocational advice. A poor command of Latin in men who were supposed to be shepherds of souls provoked some of Gerald’s most heated rhetoric. In one of the attacks he made on Hubert Walter at the papal curia, Gerald paired Hubert’s poor command of Latin with supposed grievous and public errors concerning the nature of the trinity.\(^{358}\) Because he knew the abbot of St. Dogmael’s learning was deficient, Gerald contrived to have his enemy subjected to a humiliating public test of his literacy.\(^{359}\)

Perhaps the best evidence of Gerald’s almost fanatical devotion to learning can be found in one of the final works of his long life, the *Speculum Ecclesie*.\(^{360}\) This work is well-known as a compilation of scandalous stories, most of which excoriate monks. The prologue is badly mutilated, but R.W. Hunt has offered a careful reconstruction. In the

\(^{357}\) In the *Speculum Ecclesie* I.7, Gerald makes a milder argument to this same effect by quoting St Jerome. *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera IV*, pp. 21-22.

\(^{358}\) *De Invect.*, pp. 100-101; see also Butler, pp. 282-283.

\(^{359}\) *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera III* p. 234.

\(^{360}\) Richard Kay has suggested it was written with the hope that it might influence the fourth Lateran council. See “Gerald of Wales and the Fourth Lateran Council,” *Viator* 29 (1998), pp. 79-94.
prologue of the *Speculum Ecclesie*, Gerald denounced as the worst threats to the church in England not heresy, nor wealth, nor sexual vice, but an insufficient grounding in literature; this evil manifested itself not only in wrong doctrine but wrong pronunciation of the liturgy. Educated men, Gerald believed, were jumping too quickly from grammar to dialectic or to professional studies in medicine and law. He insisted that students turn from law to the liberal arts, and then “build on them canonical and theological studies necessary to the salvation of mankind.”

Before he offered any of the scandalous stories of depraved monks for which the *Speculum Ecclesie* is infamous, Gerald lamented that the real problem in the English church was that poor education had led to faulty pronunciation in the Mass: Gerald singled out Canterbury for criticism, “I wish that in the see of Canterbury… the vicious pronunciation nightly and daily of words in the choir should cease for the future and the grace and the glory of literature be after

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361 Gerald was not unique in his fussiness about pronunciation. In an article on Alan of Lille, Richard Hamilton Green wrote of, “…the mediaeval attitude, which regarded language not only as a specifying virtue of human as opposed to animal nature, but as a natural phenomenon which, although in many ways a product of convention, derives its integrity from the truth of things which it expresses. John of Salisbury, Alan's great contemporary, says of the grammatical arts that "they imitate nature, and to some degree have their origin in nature, and in all things as far as possible strive to conform to nature." This accounts, I think, for the special appropriateness of the grammarian's descriptive terms for aberrations in locution - they were barbarisms and, even more clearly, vices.” Richard Hamilton Green, “Alan of Lille’s *De Planctu Naturae*” *Speculum*, Vol. 31, No. 4 (Oct., 1956), p. 661.

362 Brewer’s translation - *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera IV*, p. xii.

long interval restored to its pristine honor.”

Years earlier, Gerald had dedicated two entire chapters of the *Gemma Ecclesiastica* to reviewing the grammatical errors of clerics and of prelates. The *Gemma* was written within two years of Gerald’s supposed visit to Wechelen; it was the fruit of the very period of theological study that Gerald claimed he embarked upon only after receiving Wechelen’s blessing. And yet, in the *Gemma Ecclesiastica*, Gerald had written:

Prelates, therefore, should not ordain anyone for the care of souls unless he is sufficiently, or at least moderately, educated. The sincere but little educated, even though they are upright and devout, should not be placed in charge where there are many souls to be cared for. They should rather be advised to enter religious orders where they may have only themselves to look after.

Could there be a more apt description of Wechelen, the anchorite of Llowes, than “sincere but little educated?” Can we accept the claim Gerald made in *the De Rebus a se Gestis* that he had visited such a man at a moment of crisis in his life?

The weight of the number of exemplars of pious solitaries in the *Gemma Ecclesiastica* and Gerald’s apparent enthusiasm for hermits in the *Itinerarium Kambriae* must be set against the contrary examples offered above. Gerald expressed serious doubt as to the spiritual utility of the more severe forms of asceticism at the beginning (the *Topographia Hibernica*), middle (the *Gemma Ecclesiastica*), and end (the *Epistola ad...* 

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364 Brewer’s translation - *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera IV*, p. xii.

365 *Gemma*, pp. 259-266; *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera II*, pp. 341-348.

366 *Gemma*, p. 272; *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera II*, p. 357.
Stephanum Langton) of his career. Furthermore, he was positively shrill on the subject of clerical literacy. Although neither of these demonstrable facts constitutes absolute proof that Gerald would never have called upon a partially literate anchorite for counsel, the contrast between what Gerald wrote about Wechelen and the opinion he expressed of religious solitaries elsewhere in his writings certainly problematizes the exoteric reading of the Wechelen story. A close examination of the Painscastle section of the story undermines it entirely.

The Wechelen Story: The Anchorite and the Painscastle Disaster

Perhaps a historian who has read widely in Gerald’s writings might be suspicious of his claim that he took counsel with an illiterate anchorite during an important turning point in his life. However, there is little in the first two sections of the Wechelen story that would cause anyone to dismiss the Wechelen story outright as a literal, historical account. An exoteric interpretation of the Painscastle section of the Wechelen story, however, cannot withstand close scrutiny. For the remainder of this chapter I will subject the exoteric layer of the Painscastle story to precisely such scrutiny. In order to follow this minute examination closely, it is helpful to reread the Painscastle section of the Wechelen story:

Now it happened that the Welsh besieged Painscastle in Elfael (built a short time before). And when a multitude of the English army had been assembled at Hay and thereabouts, a certain woman disguised as a nun came to them – as though she had been sent by the aforementioned anchorite – advising them and counseling them on his part so that they would join the Welsh in battle without fear, promising them certain victory. And because they had faith in him as a holy man, it was done, and in one day around three thousand of the Welsh fell. When word had spread throughout the entire province, the archdeacon came to visit his
friend the anchorite (which he would do most gladly when opportunity permitted), who at once, among other things, reported to him concerning this talk. And he was greatly pained that such talk should be spread around concerning himself; swearing, furthermore, that he had never given any such instruction to the English or even knew about it. Indeed he said, just as he ought, that he would prefer to advise against rather than to advocate such combat between Christians, from which the shedding of blood would arise. He said that the Devil, on account of the perdition of many which he foresaw as a consequence and the great profit in souls that would come to him out of this conflict, procured that such a message should come to the English as though from him whom they considered trustworthy; and the angel of Satan - in order that she might defame him as the author and instigator of the slaughter - transformed herself, as if into an angel of light.  

Even with the supernatural elements entirely bracketed, two aspects of this story are so utterly fantastic that they discredit the entire tale as a literal historical account. First of all, Gerald would have us believe that in the aftermath of the Painscastle disaster, the native Welsh believed a rumor to the effect that the devastating English attack had been undertaken at the prompting of a local Welsh anchorite. Furthermore, Gerald would also have us believe that the English heeded this sanguinary advice even though they believed it to have been conveyed by a nun. It is inconceivable that the Welsh would have believed such a rumor because it describes behavior that could scarcely be credited to the English.

At the risk of laboring the point, it is important to review section III of the Wechelen story very carefully. Wechelen’s version of events is not that he knows nothing about Painscastle, or that he is ignorant of military matters, or that he is too obscure for his word to weigh heavily in the counsels of powerful Plantagenet courtiers. Wechelen’s defense against the hostile rumor in circulation among the Welsh is instead

\[367\] For the Latin, please see Introduction, p. 35, n. 105.
that he did not tell the English to attack Painscastle, but that someone else did in his name. That is to say, Wechelen does not deny that he could have exercised influence over the English, indeed the anchorite accepts that the English attacked the Welsh under the impression that he had urged them to do so. From Wechelen’s perspective, then, the offending rumor is not completely crazy – it is correct insofar as it assumes that the anchorite could wield great influence in the counsels of the English army. The rumor is correct in holding that this army marched upon what they believed to be the anchorite’s word. The problem with the rumor, according to Wechelen, was that he had “had never given any such instruction to the English or even knew about it” but rather that a “woman disguised as a nun” gave them the aggressive advice under the pretence that she had been sent by Wechelen. It was this woman who had been “advising them and counseling them on his part so that they would join the Welsh in battle without fear, promising them certain victory.”

For us to accept that the Wechelen story is a literal account of an historical event, then, we must accept that the native Welsh would have believed that the English army sent to relieve Painscastle went into battle upon the advice of a local anchorite. Furthermore, we must accept that the English were encouraged to undertake their attack because they believed that the sanguinary advice of a local holy man had been credibly conveyed to them by a nun. Gerald asks too much of us; in the Painscastle section of the Wechelen story, he has completely departed not only from accepted hagiographic topoi but from the quotidian social expectations of his contemporaries.

In neither hagiographic literature nor in any contemporary chronicles can I find
any examples of an anchorite exercising influence over military matters. To be sure, anchorites might be consulted by the powerful, but I have never found an example of such a consultation resulting in anything but spiritual advice. When, for example, Wulfric of Haselbury made a prophecy concerning King Stephen’s reign, he did so in the context of Stephen’s personal spiritual disposition; it was not political advice but moral commentary. In my study of twelfth-century solitaries, I have found no examples whatsoever of respected anchorites advocating violence.\textsuperscript{368} I am aware of only two examples of religious solitaries of any sort encouraging violence. Neither of these solitaries were anchorites - both were called hermits in the sources – and neither were venerated for what they had done.

A century before Painscastle, Peter the Hermit traveled widely in France and was quite successful in recruiting pilgrims for the first crusade. The vast majority of his recruits were not, however, trained warriors or members of the aristocratic elite. Even at the time, chroniclers who commented upon Peter’s efforts were cool toward them and he certainly did not inspire posterity to imitation or respect.\textsuperscript{369}

In his \textit{Historia Rerum Anglicarum}, William of Newburgh recorded that among those stirring up the mob that carried out the horrific 1190 pogrom against York’s Jewish

\textsuperscript{368} Of course there are examples of spectacularly violent acts of retribution in \textit{vitae} of solitaries, but these are carried out by God – perhaps with the encouragement of a saint’s curse – but never by armies following a holy man’s political counsel.

community was a “certain hermit.”\textsuperscript{370} The mob consisted of “… all the workingmen, all the city’s youth with a great mob of bumpkins and not a few military men.”\textsuperscript{371} While it failed to involve the elite of the city, the mob so mastered the town that it was able to utilize siege engines to assail Clifford’s tower. William recorded with some satisfaction that during the placement of those engines the \textit{Praemonstratensi heremita} was crushed with a rock; indeed he speculated that this hermit was the only one to die from among the Christians because his fault exceeded anyone else’s involved in the siege.\textsuperscript{372} Neither the example of this \textit{Praemonstratensi heremita} nor that of Peter the Hermit suggests that an anchorite would have been thought an acceptable source of military counsel – indeed, they seem to indicate that meddling in military matters or advocating violence would have compromised an anchorite’s sanctity in the eyes of his contemporaries.

Even the briefest consideration of the commanders of the English force gathered at Hay to relieve Painscastle renders the Wechelen rumor even more unlikely. Representing the authority of King Richard I were Geoffrey fitz Peter, recently elevated to justiciar, and Hubert Walter, archbishop of Canterbury. These two men were not excitable bumpkins gripped by crusading fever, but military veterans who had risen to the


\textsuperscript{371} “… omne genus opificum, atque universa juventus urbana cum plurima provincialium turba, et militaribus viris non paucis…” \textit{Historia Rerum Anglicarum}, p. 316.

\textsuperscript{372} “Declaratumque est, quod ratione vel professionis vel ordinis, major in eo petulantis facti reatus exsectorit, quem solum ex nostris ibidem infeliciter occumbere contigit.” \textit{Historia Rerum Anglicarum}, p. 317-18.
summit of curial power in England. Geoffrey, later made an earl by King John, has been better remembered as an administrator. Nevertheless, the relief of Painscastle was his third military campaign. He had led soldiers against an earlier Welsh rising in 1192 and in 1193 he took the field for King Richard against John at the siege of Windsor.\textsuperscript{373}

Hubert Walter’s military experience was second to none. While still bishop of Salisbury, he had played a vital role in the third crusade. Between the death of Baldwin, archbishop of Canterbury and the sickness of King Richard I, it had often fallen to Hubert to command the epic siege of Acre.\textsuperscript{374} Indeed, Richard sent Hubert to negotiate in person with Saladin. In 1194, when John’s men held Marlborough Castle against forces loyal to King Richard, Hubert oversaw the siege of that most important fortification.\textsuperscript{375} It is inconceivable that these two experienced commanders would have taken an army into field on the advice of a local anchorite.\textsuperscript{376}

And yet, perhaps we might accept that the advice of a Welsh anchorite – one who survives in the historical record only in a few pages of Gerald’s works - would have been weighted so heavily by these two veteran campaigners that they would have ordered an


\textsuperscript{374} Young, p. 34.

\textsuperscript{375} Cheney, \textit{Hubert Walter}, p. 91. Cheney explains: “The public conscience was apparently not affronted at the sight of prelates engaged in directing military operations. The wearing of armour and carrying of weapons excited disapproval, but generalship or attendance in an army did not.” (p. 5)

\textsuperscript{376} While it is true that Hubert Walter was not immune to the charisma of holy ascetics, his conversations with Adam of Dryburgh were explicitly spiritual; the archbishop never sought out the Carthusian prior for his political wisdom. See above, p. 138.
English army into the field at Wechelen’s suggestion. Perhaps we might allow that a solitary’s counsel to the English would become so well-known after the conclusion of the battle that the discomfited Welsh would have credited their defeat to a local solitary. Even so, it beggars belief that anyone in the English army would have followed such counsel when it was delivered by “a woman disguised as a nun.”

The reasons for this are both practical and ideological. Practically speaking, there cannot have been many nuns handy in this section of the Welsh march. Opportunities for women religious were very limited in Wales. While the later medieval Welsh venerated local female saints of earlier centuries, according to Jane Cartwright “the importance of contemporary holy women in medieval Wales appears to have been negligible. Indeed, there were remarkably few formal communities of religious women.”³⁷⁷ Allowing for the paucity of sources, Cartwright has estimated the number of nuns at any particular time in later medieval Wales to have been “at most roughly thirty-five woman.”³⁷⁸ Furthermore, for the English to have accepted important advice conveyed by a woman they believed to be a nun, they must surely have asked themselves from which convent she had come. To carry Wechelen’s message, after all, she would have had to first go to Llowes to meet the anchorite, and then travel roughly three miles from Llowes to Hay, where the English army was assembled.

Dom David Knowles recorded only one nunnery in Elfael for the entire medieval

³⁷⁸ Cartwright, p. 182.
period, the short-lived Cistercian house of Llansaintffraed. Founded by Abbot Enoch of Strata Marcella in 1174, the house did not survive the scandal of Enoch’s elopement with Llansaintffraed’s beautiful abbess. Knowles reckoned it closed by 1186. Gerald knew this very well, in several different works he recorded the story of Enoch and the abbess with malicious glee.

In all of Wales, only three nunneries operated over the long term in the later middle ages. Llanllyr in western Deheubarth was without question operating in 1198; Knowles recorded that this daughter house of Strata Florida was patronized by the Lord Rhys and that at its height it may have housed “16 nuns, many of noble birth.” However this house was over 60 miles away from Llowes, over rough terrain. Llanlugan in Powys was closer, although still over forty miles, but it is not certain when the house was founded. According to Cartwright, Llanlugan was founded “probably some time between 1179 and 1190, although possibly later.” Finally, there was the Priory of St Mary at Usk, a Benedictine priory about thirty-five miles away from Llowes founded in

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380 Gerald records this incident, with variations in the story, in the *Gemma Ecclesiastica* (*Giraldi Cambrensis Opera II*, p. 248), the *Speculum Ecclesie* (*Giraldi Cambrensis Opera IV*, pp. 168-9), and the *Itinerarium Kambriae* (*Giraldi Cambrensis Opera VI*, p. 59). Jane Cartwright has suggested that Gerald may have made the entire incident up. Cartwright, pp. 178-181.

381 Cartwright, p. 177.

382 Knowles and Hadcock, p. 274.

While there were many more houses for religious women in England than in Wales, most of these (for good reason) were not located on the march. Of the two English houses for women religious along the march, Acornbury and Limebrook, only Limebrook was established by 1198. This smaller Herefordshire nunnery was also a fair distance from Llowes - about 35 miles. Therefore, the English commanders who were supposedly deceived by this “woman disguised as a nun” would have had to believe that this same “nun,” in order to be the bearer of Wechelen’s advice, had traveled at least 35 miles along the march during a general rising of the native Welsh.

Furthermore, the military advice of an obscure anchorite would not have been rendered any more credible for having been carried by a nun. While Periculoso, the legislation requiring the enclosure of all women who had taken religious vows, was not issued until 1298, nuns were subject to the same Benedictine strictures as monks. Indeed these were enforced more rigidly in the case of women. Eileen Power wrote:

Strictly speaking this system of enclosure applied equally to monks and to nuns;

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384 Knowles and Hadcock, p. 274.

385 The march was too volatile to make a good site for a religious foundation. In the aftermath of the death of Henry I, for example, border violence caused Llanthony Priory to split into two houses: Llanthony Prima and Llanthony Secunda. F. G. Cowley, The Monastic Order in South Wales, 1066-1349, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1977), p. 32.

386 Acornbury was established c. 1200 as a mixed house with a hospital connected to the sisters of St John of Jerusalem sometime during King John’s reign. Knowles and Hadcock, pp. 278-279.
but from the earliest times it was considered to be a more vital necessity for the well being of the latter; and the history of the enclosure movement is in effect the history of an effort to add a fourth vow of claustration to the three cardinal vows of the nun.\footnote{387}

A brief and varied flowering of women’s religious vocations which had marked the first half of the twelfth century had, by 1198, largely given way to a new conservatism in women’s vocations and stricter segregation between the sexes in religious life.\footnote{388} Influential twelfth-century reformers such as Ivo of Chartres, Peter the Venerable, and even Abelard had placed particular emphasis on claustration of women.\footnote{389} This does not absolutely exclude the possibility that an anchorite might have had a close enough relationship to a nun that he would entrust her with an important message. Nor does this mean that nuns never left their convents; of course they did - often to the vexation of male reformers and bishops.\footnote{390} It does suggest, however, that the leaders of the English army gathered at Hay were not very likely to take a gyrovague nun far from her convent seriously as a credible bearer of important military advice – especially if that advice supposedly came from an ascetic renowned for his piety.

It is important to stress that in problematizing the Painscastle portion of the

\footnote{390}{Indeed in 1284 Archbishop Pecham complained that the nuns of Usk were wandering outside the convent and staying with lay people. (Cartwright, p. 184.)}
Wechelen chapter as I have, I scarcely touched upon the supernatural aspect of the story.

Gerald’s writings are riddled with the supernatural; he was a man of his age. Robert Bartlett wrote of Gerald and his contemporaries:

> Whereas different writers of the time might place different stress upon the miraculous, none rejected the possibility of direct divine or demonic irruption. There was, moreover, a deep predisposition to accept miracles…. There was virtually no skepticism about miracles as such, although particular miracles might be discounted on partisan grounds.³⁹¹

The use of any late twelfth- or early thirteenth-century narrative source must employ a hermeneutic capable of sifting the supernatural elements embedded in accounts of quotidian historical events. No medievalist could make substantial use of his sources while conforming strictly to Norman Cohn’s dictum that: “Stories which have manifestly impossible features are not to be trusted in any particular, as evidence of what happened.”³⁹² All this to say, I have nowhere suggested that we ought to be suspicious of the Painscastle story because Wechelen blames the Devil for the terrible slaughter and an “angel of Satan” for damaging his reputation. It is not necessary to invoke the diabolical explanation Wechelen offers for his misfortunes to call the whole story into question - the story is incredible without it.

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³⁹¹ Bartlett, p. 104.

Chapter 3: The Esoteric Reading of the Wechelen Story, Part I

When Gerald wrote the *De Rebus a se Gestis* sometime between 1208 and 1216, he deliberately distorted his public career to bring it into retrospective conformity with the pro-Welsh stance he adopted after 1199. The exoteric layer of the Wechelen story must be understood as an integral part of Gerald’s self-revision; it cannot, however, be accepted as a literal account of a historical event. In this chapter I will argue that the preponderance of the evidence suggests Wechelen never existed outside Gerald’s imagination and that that the anchorite of Llowes must be understood as a literary, rather than a historical figure. I will introduce the esoteric reading of the Wechelen story by unveiling the anchorite of Llowes as an author-stand in. That is to say, in the *De Rebus a se Gestis*, Wechelen is a double of Gerald cleverly devised to stand in the author’s place in the text. Gerald intended the esoteric reading of the Wechelen story for only a few readers; for these select readers, the anchorite’s name, the location of his cell, his ungrammatical Latin, and his ill-treatment at the hands of Cistercian monks would all have mirrored Gerald. In Chapter Four, I will complete the esoteric reading by revealing the identities of the “woman disguised as a nun” and the “Devil” and in so doing disclose its meaning and purpose.
Wechelen in the Historical Record

Gerald is the only contemporary source for Wechelen, the anchorite of Llowes. While the paucity of sources for Wales makes proving that any putatively historical figure never existed impossible, the complete absence of Wechelen from any source not written by Gerald has bolstered my suspicion that the anchorite of Llowes only ever existed as a literary creation of Gerald’s. This is not to suggest, however, that everything about Wechelen is incredible.

It is certainly not Wechelen’s rigorous solitary vocation that taxes our credulity. In light of the austerity of the undertaking, the number of anchorites in twelfth and thirteenth-century Christendom was surprisingly large. Ann K. Warren studied anchorites and their patrons in later medieval England; she characterized this most severe form of asceticism as “a wide-ranging and far-reaching religious phenomenon: many anchorites all over the country.” Warren found evidence attesting to the existence of 96 anchorites in England during the twelfth century and 198 during the thirteenth. Evidence for most of these religious solitaries survives only in records of almsgiving – the vast majority of anchorites did not even attract the attention of chroniclers, never mind biographers.

It is conceivable, therefore, that Wechelen was one of the many pious solitaries

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for which Wales was at least as well known as England. While he does not exist anywhere in the historical record outside of Gerald’s writings, it is possible that Wechelen lived in such obscurity that only the archdeacon of Brecon bothered to preserve his name for posterity. The problem with this hypothesis is that Gerald’s description of Wechelen in the De Rebus a se Gestis suggests that the anchorite of Llowes was not at all obscure. According to Gerald, armies took the field at what they believed to be the anchorite’s suggestion and the sick, in the expectation of miraculous healing, implored Wechelen’s aid through the window of his cell. His miracles supposedly continued after his death. Such purported eminence seems inconsistent with this anchorite’s absence from other contemporary records.

It is certainly inconsistent with Wechelen’s absence from Gerald’s other literary efforts. Gerald does not mention his friend the eminent anchorite in any work that is not primarily concerned with the Saint David’s controversy. If Wechelen was an historical personage, rather than a literary creation, his absence from the Gemma Ecclesiastica and the Speculum Ecclesie is particularly hard to explain. Composed between 1196-1198, the Gemma Ecclesiastica was the fruit of the very period of study that Gerald claimed he had undertaken with Wechelen’s blessing. Furthermore, the Gemma was written to instruct the clergy of the very archdeaconry wherein Wechelen was purported to have been

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395 “Nowhere will you see hermits and anchorites more abstinent and more spiritually committed than in Wales.” Description, p. 254; Giraldi Cambrensis Opera VI, p. 204.

396 Gemma, p. xi.
enclosed.\textsuperscript{397} And yet, while Gerald stocked the \textit{Gemma} with a large number of edifying stories about religious solitaries, he did not so much as mention Wechelen. The \textit{Speculum Ecclesie} was written much later, c. 1215.\textsuperscript{398} For this work, Gerald drew extensively on anecdotes of notable events and important or scandalous personages among the religious orders in Wales. In Book I of the \textit{Speculum Ecclesie}, Gerald even discoursed briefly upon the solitary vocations. And yet, despite the obvious thematic appropriateness, Gerald found no occasion in the \textit{Speculum Ecclesie} to mention Wechelen, an anchorite local to Wales whom he claimed, in the \textit{De Rebus}, to have known.\textsuperscript{399}

These are not the only works of Gerald’s in which we should expect to find the anchorite of Llowes, but do not. Gerald neglected to mention Wechelen in the \textit{Descriptio Kambriae}. More surprisingly, he did not make even the briefest reference to his supposed friend and counselor in the \textit{Itinerarium Kambriae}. Not only the route Gerald took on the preaching tour, but the pious interests of his archiepiscopal companion ought to have occasioned some mention of the anchorite of Llowes. According to Gerald, Archbishop Baldwin’s party passed through Hay and into Brecknockshire.\textsuperscript{400} This route would have taken them about two miles from Wechelen was supposedly enclosed. In Book I chapters ii and iii of the \textit{Itinerarium}, he offered a long and discursive treatment of

\textsuperscript{397} \textit{Gemma}, p. 3.


\textsuperscript{399} \textit{Giraldi Cambrensis Opera IV}, pp. 18-20; 21-22.

\textsuperscript{400} \textit{Journey}, p. 80; \textit{Giraldi Cambrensis Opera VI}, p. 20.
Despite the many digressions in these chapters and Gerald’s often baroque discourses on the history and geographic features of the surrounding country, he wrote nothing of Wechelen. This is all the more surprising when one considers that Gerald was traveling in the entourage of Baldwin, archbishop of Canterbury. Baldwin had been the abbot of the Cistercian house at Ford. The monks of Ford had a significant spiritual investment in the sanctity of their own nearby anchorite, Wulfric of Haselbury (d. 1154). John of Ford dedicated the *Vita Wulfrici* to Baldwin, his former abbot, around the time Baldwin undertook this preaching tour. Surely Gerald would have learned of his enthusiasm for anchorites? Surely he ought to have brought either Wechelen or his other supposed anchoritic friend at Newgale to Baldwin’s attention during their journey?

Gerald did not even mention Wechelen in all three of his treatments of the St. David’s controversy; the anchorite appears in the *De Rebus a se Gestis* and in the *De Invectionibus*, but not in the *De Iure et Statu Menevensis Ecclesie*. Wechelen appears in two different chapters of the *De Rebus*. The Wechelen story is, of course, found in Book III chapter ii. If all of Book III had survived, Wechelen would have appeared again in chapter ccxxv. This missing chapter purported to relate a vision Wechelen had

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401 *Journey*, pp. 80-107; *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera VI*, pp. 20-47.

402 *De Vita Beati Wulfrici Anachoretae Haselbergiae*, xvi-xviii.

403 Newgale is traversed with no mention of Matthew in Bk I ch 13. *Journey*, pp. 156-7; *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera VI*, pp. 99-100.

404 *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I*, pp. 89-93.

experienced, and then described in a letter to Gerald.\textsuperscript{406} Gerald copied much of the visionary material at the end of the intact \textit{De Rebus a se Gestis} into Book VI of the \textit{De Invectionibus}; Wechelen’s vision survives there in chapter xx.\textsuperscript{407}

Wechelen’s Esoteric Identity I: The Anchorite’s Name and Place

It is important to point out one last time before beginning the esoteric interpretation of the Wechelen story that the exoteric layer of the story was designed as the focal point of Gerald’s deliberately distorted and truncated account of his activities from 1191-1199; it is not a mere husk intended only to conceal the author’s esoteric message. Indeed the Wechelen story as a whole both conceals and reveals. The exoteric layer of the Wechelen story, written for the many, conceals the esoteric layer, composed for the few. The exoteric layer also beclouds into a useful obscurity almost a decade of Gerald’s career. Gerald enlisted the borrowed charisma of Wechelen, an ascetical holy man, to sanctify his own failure at court and to veil his secular maneuverings in the years which followed. This borrowing of charisma is accomplished not only through Wechelen’s blessing of Gerald’s new scholarly vocation, but also by the parallel Gerald implied between their vocations. Wechelen was an anchorite, a man literally sealed into a tiny cell for the purpose of prayer and contemplation. When he introduced his retreat

\textsuperscript{406} For the vision of Wechelen in the \textit{De Invectionibus}, please see Chapter Three, pp. 192-201.

\textsuperscript{407} \textit{De Invect.}, pp. 220-221.
into scholarship through the story of his visit to a man sealed away from the world, Gerald rhetorically appropriated this holy separation to himself.

The esoteric reading of the Wechelen story also reveals and conceals. Gerald meant the esoteric reading for a very few, so he crafted it in such a way that only these few readers would be capable of a dual reading of the story. A reader of the esoteric layer of the story would have been quite competent in Latin, of course, but also a speaker of Welsh knowledgeable about Welsh political affairs. And yet, such a reader would not himself have been omniscient or immune to Gerald’s rhetoric. Even a reader who understood that Wechelen was an authorial double of Gerald could still have been influenced by the exoteric layer’s presentation of Gerald as a man finally disillusioned by the court and thereafter detached from public events. Furthermore, just as the anchorite imparts some of his charismatic authority to Gerald in the exoteric reading, Gerald’s choice of a solitary ascetic as his doppelganger in the esoteric reading allows him to appropriate some measure of ascetical charisma to himself - without having to bother much with the disciplines of asceticism. In two other literary productions, Gerald wrote that ascetic solitaries were held in particular admiration by the Welsh.\footnote{“Nowhere will you see hermits and anchorites more abstinent and more spiritually committed than in Wales.” \textit{Description}, p. 54; \textit{Giraldi Cambrensis Opera VI}, p. 204. Gerald repeated this in the Prologue of the \textit{De Iure et Statu Menevensis Ecclesie}. \textit{Giraldi Cambrensis Opera III}, p.115.} This suggests that by selecting an anchorite as his double, Gerald attempted to appropriate to himself not only ascetical qualities, but Welshness as well.

The very name that Gerald chose for the anchorite of Llowes constitutes one of
the strongest arguments that Wechelen served in the text of the *De Rebus* as a double for Gerald. One cannot automatically assume that “Wechelen” (or “Wecheleu”) is transliteration into Latin of a Welsh name. In addition to the many English settlers on the Welsh march, King Henry I had embarked upon a program of deliberately imposing Flemish colonizers. Indeed, one of Gerald’s brothers spoke Flemish. Therefore, “Wechelen” could be an Anglo-Saxon or Flemish name. However, because of the extremely rural location of Gerald’s anchorite at Llowes in Elfael and because I found no examples of the name “Wechelen” in the indices to English chronicles and saints’ lives, I brought the name to the attention of two authorities in medieval Welsh. After reviewing the orthographic evidence, Heather Rose Jones concluded that “there's a strong context for interpreting your "Wechelen" as Gwyddelan… None of the orthographic variation involved would require any sort of stretch. On the negative side, Gwyddelan is decidedly rare name; on the positive side, the known examples are distributed about as widely throughout Wales as you could get.” Jones added: “A related name that appears as a byname rather than a given name is "Gwyddel," deriving from an ethnic nickname meaning "Irishman".” I also consulted Dr. Diana Luft, having been referred to her by the chair of the Department of Welsh at Cardiff University. Dr. Luft affirmed Jones’ orthographic work, adding:

The argument… for Wechelen being a transliteration of a name with the 'Gwyddel' stem, either Gwyddelan (attested only in the place name Llanwyddelan and the 'Goyddelyn' example) or the slightly more common examples of forms of

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409 Bartlett, p. 13.

410 Heather Rose Jones, email correspondence with the author, October, 2007.
'Gwyddelau' (Hwetheleu, Wetheleu, Hwiteloue) with an n/u confusion, is very compelling. I would only add that 'Gwyddel' is not a Welsh ethnic nickname for the Irish - it is the common Welsh word, both medieval and modern, for 'Irishman'. In fact, the Irish term for Irishman (Goidel, Gael) is a borrowing from this Welsh word.\textsuperscript{411}

I believe that Gerald quite deliberately chose the Welsh word for “Irishman” as the name for his authorial double; for the right reader, the allusion to the author of the \textit{De Rebus} would have been hard to miss. Why “Irishman?” While Gerald’s family had been established among the colonizers of Wales ever since his grandfather had served as a castellan for Henry I, they were not great men of the March. Robert Bartlett has reckoned that the de Barri family may have held only two knights’ fees in Wales.\textsuperscript{412} Indeed Gerald’s snide remark about Richard de Clare (1130-1176), that “he had succeeded to a name rather than to possessions,” was at least as true, in miniature, of his own family.\textsuperscript{413} The de Barri family fortune was not truly made until an Irish “king,” Dermot MacMurrough (1110-71), recruited Gerald’s kinsmen to come to Ireland and help him recover Leinster.

Robert Bartlett reckoned that Gerald’s kinsmen constituted “virtually all the major figures of the early days of the invasion - fitzStephen, the fitzGeralds, the Carews, [and] Meiler fitzHenry (Justiciar of Ireland 1199-1208).”\textsuperscript{414} They were motivated primarily by

\textsuperscript{411} Diana Luft, email correspondence with the author, October 9, 2009.

\textsuperscript{412} Bartlett, p. 20, n, 43.


\textsuperscript{414} Bartlett, pp. 20-21.
the possibility of “a sudden augmentation of a family fortune...”\textsuperscript{415} The de Barri clan certainly succeeded in this “sudden augmentation;” two of Gerald’s brothers, Philip and Robert, ended up with substantial holdings in Ireland; Gerald’s extended family prospered there also. Over the course of his life, Gerald visited Ireland at least four times; indeed, he resided there for a time after the St. David’s controversy. Two of his literary works took Ireland as their subject. In one of them, the \textit{Expugnatio Hiberniae}, Gerald celebrated his kinsmen’s prowess in overcoming the native Irish and their success in augmenting the family holdings.\textsuperscript{416}

In the \textit{De Rebus a se Gestis}, Gerald took great care to remind the reader of his own and his family’s connections to Ireland: five chapters of the second book of the \textit{De Rebus} treat Irish material exclusively.\textsuperscript{417} In Book II chapter ix, Gerald boasted: “Robert and Maurice, the sons of Nest, with their nephews Raymond and Meiler and their sons and kinsfolk, crossed the Irish sea and by their valour began the conquest of that Kingdom; and they kept for themselves and their folk thirty cantrefs and more of the Irish realm...”\textsuperscript{418} In chapter x, Gerald recalled his service in the entourage of Prince John during the future king’s ill-fated tour of Ireland in 1185.\textsuperscript{419} Gerald claimed he had been

\textsuperscript{415} Bartlett, p. 20.

\textsuperscript{416} For example Book II chapter x, \textit{Expugnatio Hibernica} pp. 156-159.

\textsuperscript{417} \textit{De Rebus}, Book II chapters x-xv, \textit{Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I}, pp. 60-72.

\textsuperscript{418} Butler, p. 83; \textit{Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I}, p. 59.

\textsuperscript{419} For a dissent from the historical consensus that John’s 1185 expedition was a fiasco, see James Lydon, \textit{The Lordship of Ireland in the Middle Ages}, (Toronto: Gill and Macmillan, 1972), p. 63.
attached to John’s entourage by King Henry, “because he had a host of kinsmen there, sprung from the first conquerors of that nation, and because he had shown himself an honest and prudent man.”

Beginning in chapter x and over the course of chapters xi and xii, Gerald discoursed on the failure of King John in Ireland - a failure he attributed to John’s shabby treatment of the Irish church.

In chapter xiii, having presented himself as a would-be reformer of the church in Ireland, Gerald claimed that John offered him:

…the choice of two Bishoprics then vacant, that of Wexford, also called Ferns, and that of Leighlin, and when he refused them both, offered him the two Churches and Sees, to be converted into a single diocese, if he were willing to undertake their government. To which he replied, that if he saw that the Earl’s intent was to exalt and upraise the Church in Ireland, he would perhaps accept the honour offered him, that he might work with him and help him to that end. But since the Earl’s heart was not set on this, he preferred rather to remain a private person than to be placed in power where he could do no good.”

He took care both to rehearse his long experience of Ireland and to recall his Irish works to the attention of readers of the *De Rebus*:

Seeing then that the Earl made no advance toward that end, but that the state of Ireland was every day the worse for his coming, and considering the many strange and notable things that he observed in that country, things found nowhere else and utterly unknown, he set himself with great zeal and diligent inquiry to collect materials first for his Topography and then for his *Conquest of Ireland*, that he might at least by his own labour win some profit or conquest thereby. So when the Earl, after spending the whole summer and part of the winter in Ireland all to no purpose, recrossed the sea and returned to Wales and England, Giraldus was left with Bertram of Verdun, the Seneschal of Ireland, to be his comrade and the witness of his deeds, and remained in the Island to the following Easter, that he might pursue his studies more fully, not merely gathering materials but setting

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420 Butler, p. 86; *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I*, p. 61.

421 Butler, p. 90; *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I*, p. 65.
them in order.”

A passage found in book II chapter xxiii is of the greatest significance to the esoteric layer of the Wechelen story. According to Gerald, John had expressed to him his great relief at having been absolved of his oath to leave England during his brother’s absence because he was enamored of the wealth and luxury he enjoyed at home. Gerald, disapproving of John’s attitude, urged him to make his name by conquering more of Ireland. John was unmoved: “..the Earl did not regard his words with favour and replied that, not having so many kinsmen in Ireland, he had not such a liking for that country as the Archdeacon.” Only two brief chapters separate the Wechelen story from this very strong identification of Gerald, the Archdeacon, with Ireland.

The literary interests and inclinations Gerald demonstrated in his other works support my contention that he would have used a Welsh name transliterated into Latin to help the esoteric reader identify his literary doppelganger. Gerald gave a good deal of thought to the transliteration of names and other words. In the Itinerarium Kambriae Book I chapter iii, he offered this discourse on the origin of the name “Llanthony,” a priory located near his home in Brecon:

Butler, p. 90; Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I, p. 65.


Gerald’s revisited his Irish connections in chapters following the Wechelen story as well. Ten chapters later, Gerald recalled that his first step after his election to the see of St David’s was to go to Ireland for the counsel and support of his family. The appeal to Rome followed only weeks later. Butler, pp. 157-8. Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I, p. 112.
It is a site most suited to the practice of religion and better chosen for canonical discipline than that of any of the other monasteries in the whole Island of Britain. It was originally founded by two hermits, in honour of the eremitical way of life, in solitude and far removed from the bustle of everyday existence, and built on the bank of the Honddu, in a deep recess where that river flows along the vale. It is from the Honddu that it takes the name Llanhonddu, for “llan” means a place dedicated to religion. This derivation may seem far-fetched, for the real name of the place in Welsh is Nant Honddu. “Nant” means a stream of running water: and in the Welsh language the place is still today called Llanddewi Nant Honddu by the local inhabitants, that is the church of David on the River Honddu. The English have corrupted the name to Llanthony, whereas it ought to be called either Nant Honddu with an “N” and a “t,” that is the Honddu stream, or else Llanhondu with an L but no t, that is the church on the Honddu.\textsuperscript{425}

Furthermore, Gerald liked to find significance, even humor in the proper names of others. Lewis Thorpe wrote: “He held nothing more hilarious than that an Archdeacon of Shrewsbury called Peche (=sin) and his Dean who was a Daiville or De Eyville (=Devil or Evil) should have placed under them both Malplace (=Bad Place) and Malpas (=Bad Pass).\textsuperscript{426} Gerald often indulged in such humor to score rhetorical points. In the \textit{De Iure et Statu Menevensis}, Gerald punned on John of Tynemouth’s name; according to Gerald, Hubert Walter’s advocate before the papal court had a name that sounded, in English, like “mouth-shutting” and yet he never shut up.\textsuperscript{427} In a similar circumstance Gerald punned viciously on archdeacon Osbert’s name.\textsuperscript{428} Gerald began the second book of the \textit{Speculum Duorum} by transmuting the name of his nephew’s wicked tutor William de

\textsuperscript{425} \textit{Journey}, p. 97; \textit{Giraldi Cambrensis Opera VI}, p. 20.

\textsuperscript{426} \textit{Journey}, p. 28; 204; \textit{Giraldi Cambrensis Opera VI}, p. 146.

\textsuperscript{427} “\textit{Tinemundum, quod Os Claudens Anglice sonare videtur… illo vero non os claudente sed in contrarium acriter aperiente…” \textit{Giraldi Cambrensis Opera III}, p. 274.

\textsuperscript{428} \textit{Giraldi Cambrensis Opera III}, p. 247.
Capella into *de Capra*, “whoreson.” A few pages later, he replaced “whoreson” with “son of the goat.”

Not only is Wechelen’s name significant, so is the supposed location of his cell at Llowes in Elfael. From a letter to the Prior of Llanthony, we learn that Gerald held property, valued at “five or six marks’ income” at Llowes. Llowes was located at the edge of Gerald’s archdeaconry of Brecon - and on the western edge of the Welsh march itself, only a short walk from the English town of Hay. This makes a fair metaphor for the position Gerald was attempting to establish for himself in the *De Rebus*: that of a man who was genuinely of the Welsh, but who had once served the English crown and continued to be close to some powerful men there.

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Photograph 3: The Church of St. Meilig’s at Llowes. The church itself was rebuilt in the early 1850’s; only a portion of the tower is medieval. The site has been used for worship continuously since the foundation of a clas church there in the early middle ages. Despite a lively effort by local historians to label the significant aspects of the church - St. Meilig’s boasts an ancient standing cross and a high medieval baptismal font - I detected no local tradition of a pious anchorite having been enclosed on this site in the late twelfth century. (author’s photograph)
The language of the Wechelen story also suggests that the anchorite is a stand-in for the archdeacon. Wechelen’s rebuke of Gerald in Book III chapter ii echoes the repetition of vana, “vain,” that Gerald had employed in the previous chapter to describe his disappointing curial career. Gerald, in Book III chapter i: “Considerans autem Giraldus vanam ex toto curiae sequalem, vanas omnino promissiones, vanas et indignas nec juxta merita promotiones…”432 In the chapter immediately following, and in his ungrammatical Latin, Wechelen: “Och, Och, noli dicere scire sed custodire: vana, vana est scire nisi custodire.”433

Gerald also hints at his identification with Wechelen by the sly use of pronouns. Throughout the De Rebus a se Gestis, save for three occasions, Gerald referred to himself in the third person - most often as “the archdeacon,” archidiaconus.434 Two of the exceptions are found in the Wechelen story, and the first is particularly revealing.435 After having introduced Wechelen’s imperfect Latinity, but before explaining how the anchorite came to his miraculous knowledge of Latin, Gerald wrote: “Requirenti vero

432 Italics mine, Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I, p. 89.
433 Italics mine, Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I, p. 90.
434 Butler, p. 115; Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I, p. 83.
435 The second slip into the first person comes in the last line of the Wechelen story: Sed haec hactenus de viro sancto, a quo difficile discedimus, sicut et archidiaconus ipse de eo loquendo vix ab ea materia discedebat. Nunc autem ad rem revertamur. “But enough of the holy man, from whom I depart with difficulty, just as the archdeacon himself, when speaking of him, departed from this matter reluctantly. Now, however, I return to the matter at hand.” See Introduction, pp. 27-9.
archidiacono unde ei verba Latina, cum non didicerit, respondit in hunc modum. *Sua enim ipsius verba ponam; sicut ea libenter archidiaconus et frequenter retractare et recitare consuerat...*

I like H.E. Butler’s translation of this passage, because it preserves some of the ambiguity of the Latin: “And when the Archdeacon asked him how he got his Latin, since he had not learned it, he replied as follows (I will set down his own words, as the Archdeacon would often gladly repeat them).” With *ponam*, “I will set down,” Gerald’s narrative voice took on the rare first person. One could argue that this instance of the use of the first person is employed simply to maintain some distinction between three voices: those of Gerald, Wechelen, and the third-person narrative voice Gerald employed to tell his own story in the *De Rebus* (while at the same time distancing himself from the narrator).

I believe, however, that Gerald slipped into the first person here to preserve the ambiguity of the phrase that follows: *Sua enim ipsius verba*. The Latin *sua... verba ipsius*, literally “his words of himself” or more idiomatically “his own words” (*sua... ipsius verba*), is susceptible to the reading that whenever Wechelen spoke, the archdeacon was indeed setting down “his own words.”

Most of all, Wechelen’s ungrammatical Latin speech ought to excite our suspicion. Gerald claimed that Wechelen spoke Latin “always in the infinitive without observing the cases – and yet, he was able to be understood well enough.”

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436 *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I*, p. 90. Italics mine

437 Please see Introduction, pp. 27-9.

438 “…semper per infinitivum nec casus servabat; tamen satis intelligi poterat.” *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I*, p. 90.
Two, I argued that Wechelen’s rude Latin would not have diminished his religious authority in the eyes of his pious contemporaries and that it had its parallels in the legends of contemporary solitaries. In the esoteric reading of the story, the anchorite’s ungrammatical Latin serves an even more important function. Wechelen was created to mirror those aspects of his creator which were closest to the native Welsh. As an authorial double, Wechelen’s ungrammatical Latin mirrors Gerald’s partial competency in the Welsh language.

Historians have puzzled over the issue of Gerald’s competency in the Welsh tongue. The strongest evidence against his having any real command of Welsh is found in the *Itinerarium Kambriae*. Gerald claimed that the sermons preached by Baldwin’s party in Latin or French, including his own, had to be translated into Welsh by the archdeacon of Bangor. The lily-gilding Gerald indulged in years later when he described the preaching tour in the *De Rebus a se Gestis* dramatically underscores his apparent inability to speak Welsh:

Moreover, many were amazed that, though the Archdeacon spoke only in French and Latin, the common people who knew neither tongue wept in untold numbers no less than the rest and more than two hundred ran all together to receive the sign of the Cross. The like also befell in Germany in the case of the blessed Bernard, who speaking to Germans in the French tongue of which they were wholly ignorant, filled them with such devotion and compunction, that he called forth floods of tears from their eyes and with the greatest ease softened the hardness of their hearts so that they did and believed all that he told them; and yet when an interpreter faithfully set forth to them in their own tongue everything that he said, they were not at all moved thereat. Wherefore at the sermon’s close, when the Archdeacon sat down again, a certain Hospitaller who sat near him said to him,

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439 Please see Chapter Two, pp. 125-7; 129-30.

440 *Journey*, pp. 29; 75; 114; 186; *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera VI*, pp. 14; 55; 126.
“In truth the Holy Spirit has manifestly spoken by your mouth this day.” …Now the Archbishop, coming thence to Mynyw, since he himself was in haste to go to Rhys, Prince of South Wales, who was waiting for him at Aberteifi, deputed the Archdeacon to sow the word of God there. And many indeed ran up with great devotion to take the Cross, when they heard him; but many who had been much moved by his words and were firmly resolved to take the Cross, yet when they heard the words of his interpreter, which were far less well-ordered and persuasive, immediately recoiled from the vow that they had taken…. But on the next day…when the people of those parts were called together in the presence of Prince Rhys, a vast number were drawn to hear first the Archbishop and after him the Archdeacon. Wherefore on that same day a man named John Spang, a jester… said to Rhys, “O Rhys, you ought greatly to love this kinsman of yours, the Archdeacon; for to-day he has sent a hundred of your men or more to serve Christ; and if he had spoken in Welsh, I do not think that a single man would have been left you out of all this multitude.”

No historian has interpreted this evidence as definitive proof that Gerald knew absolutely no Welsh. The contrary evidence, derived both from Gerald’s personal circumstances and his writings, is too strong to warrant such a conclusion. While it is true that he grew up among the French-speaking colonizers and conquerors of southern Wales, in the Itinerarium Kambriae, the De Rebus a se Gestis, and elsewhere Gerald proudly identified his many native Welsh cousins. Surely he must have been able to converse with these men? For most of his life Gerald served as the archdeacon of rural Brecon. Surely he could have engaged in at least some quotidian conversations with his charges? In the Speculum Duorum, Gerald attacked his estranged nephew both for his refusing to learn Latin and French and for his acculturation to the native Welsh. Could one of Gerald’s marcher kinsmen have been raised in circumstances so radically different from Gerald’s own that he grew up fluent in Welsh while Gerald had no Welsh at all? A

441 Butler, p. 101-2; Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I, pp. 76-77.
442 Spec. Duo., p. 32; 138.
more nuanced understanding of Gerald’s fluency in Welsh is required.

The very work which seems most strongly to suggest that Gerald could not speak Welsh also furnishes evidence to the contrary. As he happened upon places of interest throughout the *Itinerarium Kambriae*, Gerald indulged in not a few etymological studies of Welsh words and place names. In addition to his treatment of “Llanthony,” Gerald offered a study of Caerleon: “Caerleon is the modern name of the City of Legions. In Welsh, “Caer” means a city or encampment.” Gerald gave a similar treatment to the name of an important ford near Newport: “It was called Rhyd Pencarn, which in Latin means “vadum sub capite rupis…” The Welsh word “rhyd” means “vadu,” “pen” means “caput” and “carn” means “rupes.” He illustrated the fecundity of Anglesey by noting that this fruitfulness was, in the Welsh tongue, proverbial: “This island produces far more grain than any other part of Wales. In the Welsh language, it has always been called “Mon man Cymru,” which means “Mona the Mother of Wales.” When crops have failed in all other regions, this island, from the richness of its soil and its abundant produce, has been able to supply all Wales.”

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443 *Journey*, p. 114; *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera VI*, p. 55.

444 *Journey*, p. 121; *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera VI*, p. 62.

In the *Descriptio Kambriae*, Gerald repeated this observation about Anglesey.\(^{446}\) In Book I of the *Descriptio*, he defined cantref using its Welsh etymology: “Wales now contains fifty-four cantrefs in all. Cantref or cantred, a word made up from “cant” meaning a hundred and “tref” meaning a vill, is a term used in both Welsh and Irish for a stretch of land which contains a hundred vills.”\(^{447}\) Robert Bartlett believed that Gerald’s interests in language and in music brought him near to something resembling the discipline of comparative philology. He praised the treatment of alliteration Gerald offered in the *Descriptio Kambriae*, writing that it:

…shows his lively ear and the natural way in which he used a comparative approach. He gave examples of Welsh, English, and Latin alliteration; the French, to his surprise, did not use it. Welsh and English alliteration, he said, was not an artistic contrivance, but a custom based on long usage. Gerald’s mixed national origin and his education enabled him to compare Welsh and English verses with passages from Virgil, and to make assertions about the nature of French poetry.\(^{448}\)

Other evidence from Gerald’s writings further complicates the question of his competency in Welsh. Gerald complained in Letter I of the *Symbolum Electorum* that while his arch-enemy William Wibert had begged to be made part of Gerald’s many legations to Wales, Wibert was useless to him because he could not speak the language. Indeed Gerald expressed considerable exasperation that anyone could have believed the charges Wibert made against him at court, since it was impossible that his slanderer could have understood anything he had heard in Wales:

\(^{446}\) *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera* VI, p. 177.

\(^{447}\) *Description*, 223-4; *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera* VI, p. 169.

\(^{448}\) Bartlett, p. 209.
…he himself accomplished nothing more with me concerning any work than a sheep. As a matter of fact, he was only standing around displaying the habit of religion mute and speechless by my side, neither having acquaintance with the language, nor knowing the land or the habits of the people.\footnote{\textit{… cum tamen non amplius ipse quam aries unus mecum ad aliqua negotia proficeret. Tantum etenim mutus et elinguis a latere regionem habitu praeferens stabat, nec linguae notitiam habens, nec patriae vel gentis mores agnoscent.} \textit{Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I}, p. 204.}

Time and again Gerald criticized bitterly the Plantagenet policy of imposing upon Welsh sees bishops who could not speak Welsh. In the \textit{Symbolum Electorum}, he offered a jaundiced characterization of the practice: “Since no one in all of Wales is worthy of the episcopal dignity, it is as though good preachers and confessors ought to be sought among Englishmen, less suitable to this in their own parts, and utterly ignorant as much of the customs of the country as of the language.”\footnote{\textit{Tanquam etiam in tanto Walliarum spatio, nemine cathedra digno reperto, inter Anglos minus in partibus suis ad hoc idoneos, tam morum patriae quam etiam linguae prosus ignaros, boni praedicatoros quaeri debeant et confessores.} \textit{Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I}, p. 302.} While defending himself from the invective of Hubert Walter, Gerald made a similar argument before the pope:

\begin{quote}
He brings it forward as though it were something to my discredit and prejudice, as who should say, “He is of Welsh birth, and for that reason ought not to be a bishop in Wales.” On that same showing Englishmen ought not to be given preferment or promotion in England, nor Frenchmen in France, nor Italians in Italy. Let pastors ignorant of the languages be appointed promiscuously in these countries, and they will be found to be good preachers.\footnote{\textit{De Invect.}, introduction (Davies translation) p. 48-9.}
\end{quote}

During the St. David’s controversy, Gerald composed a letter to the pope that was endorsed by all the major Welsh princes. In this letter, he defended his own election and the legal rights of both St. David’s and the Welsh church as a whole. These princes each
endorsed Gerald’s demand for bishops familiar with the country and its language: “… out of habit, Canterbury archbishops place in authority over us and our people English bishops, completely ignorant of the ways of our country and our language, who do not know how to preach the word of God to the people, nor how to take their confessions unless through an interpreter.”  

In private correspondence conducted years later, Gerald revisited this issue by complaining that Bishop Geoffrey de Henlaw, the foreigner promoted in his place to the see of St David’s, did not adequately supervise his charges, “whose language and customs he does not understand.”

Historians have offered nuanced interpretations of this evidence. In the introduction to his translation of the *Itinerarium Kambriae*, Lewis Thorpe offered what is perhaps the most stark hypothesis. Thorpe implied that, at least in *Itinerarium*, Gerald deliberately obscured his knowledge of the Welsh language:

> The language problem is an interesting one. Baldwin obviously knew no Welsh and he gave his sermons in Latin. One assumes that Gerald was a fluent Welsh-speaker and that the most important of all his functions would have been to translate. This was not so. When Baldwin preached the Cross, someone else interpreted, usually Alexander, Archdeacon of Bangor. When Gerald himself preached at Haverfordwest, he went out of his way to avoid using Welsh… Did he really know any Welsh? Maybe he used it when he was speaking to the Welsh princes. If so, he was careful to avoid admitting it.”

Michael Richter and Robert Bartlett are more skeptical of Gerald’s ability to

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452 “… Cantuarienses archiepiscopi ex consuetudine nobis et genti nostrae episcopos praeeficiunt Anglicos, morum patriae et linguae nostrae prorsus ignaros, qui nec verbum Dei populo praedicare sciunt, nec confessiones nisi per interpretem suscipere.” *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera III*, p. 244.


454 *Journey*, p. 29.
speak Welsh. Michael Richter wrote,

In his work [Gerald] gave a number of quotations in Welsh, but there is no positive evidence that he himself was fluent in the language. Nor is this surprising: his mother tongue was French... while his professional language, both as a clerk and as a writer, was Latin. In these two media he was completely at ease, and these were also the media of conversation in England. Not only was he apparently unable to preach in Welsh but he did not regard a knowledge of that language as desirable for a man like himself. Some years later he rebuked his nephew Giraldus fitzPhilip for not showing enough effort to overcome his exclusive knowledge of the primitive tongue (Welsh) and learn decent languages instead, like French or Latin.⁴⁵⁵

Robert Bartlett wrote that “It is probable that, although he knew many Welsh words and was interested in philology, he could not speak Welsh fluently.”⁴⁵⁶ In light of this conclusion, Bartlett received Gerald’s public posture of demanding Welsh speakers for Welsh sees with some skepticism:

The insistence on appointing bishops in Wales who had a knowledge of the welsh language sounds strange coming from Gerald’s pen. There is little possibility that his welsh could have improved between the time that his sermons had to be translated for welsh hearers, in 1188, and his election in 1199. He may have had increasing reason to practice it during the four years of his case, but even before his election he wrote “the chapter of St David’s will not consent to a monk or a physician ignorant of the language of our people, who cannot preach or receive confessions except through an interpreter.” Gerald certainly had more knowledge of welsh than most of the Archbishop’s candidates, but it is hard to escape the conclusion that he was implicitly overstating his eligibility on the grounds of knowledge of the welsh language.⁴⁵⁷

The esoteric reading of the Wechelen story supports Bartlett’s interpretation. If we understand Wechelen as an authorial double of Gerald meant to emphasize the aspect

⁴⁵⁵ Richter, *Giraldus Cambrensis*, p. 72.


⁴⁵⁷ Bartlett, p. 54.
of Gerald turned toward the Welsh, then Wechelen’s ungrammatical Latin is a mirror of
Gerald’s partial fluency in Welsh. Indeed, the parallel between the Wechelen story and
Gerald’s own life experience may suggest that Gerald thought his Welsh had improved
over the critical period between 1188 and 1199. In the story, Wechelen was granted his
ungrammatical Latin miraculously only after he had gone on a pilgrimage to the Holy
Land, returned to Wales, and renounced the world. While Gerald never completed his
armed pilgrimage (despite having taken the cross at Radnor in 1188), there is a strong
correspondence between Wechelen’s pilgrimage and enclosure and Gerald’s 1188
preaching Itinerarium through Wales and his 1194 renunciation of the court.458 While
Robert Bartlett was probably correct that Gerald’s Welsh was no better in 1199 than in
1188, the esoteric layer of the Wechelen story seems to suggest that Gerald believed he
had become more proficient in Welsh after his retirement from court. By the time Gerald
wrote the De Rebus a se Gestis, if not in 1194, he believed that his Welsh was
ungrammatical but (as he wrote of Wechelen’s Latin), “able to be understood well
enough.”459

Wechelen’s partial Latinity enhances both the exoteric and esoteric layers of the

458 Stephen G. Nichols has argued that Gerald chose to call the account of his preaching
tour through Wales an “Itinerarium” precisely because, “By the late twelfth century, the
Itinerarium stood for a literary form with almost a millennial association with the Holy
Land…” Indeed he argues that, at least as Gerald described the work in the De Rebus,
the Itinerarium is conceived as “a prologue to an eventual historia of the crusade.”
Stephen G. Nichols, “Fission and Fusion: Mediations of Power in Medieval History and
Literature” Yale French Studies, No. 70 (1986), pp. 32; 36. Gerald’s taking the cross:
Butler, pp. 98-99; 116-117; Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I, pp. 74; 84-85.

459 “…et tamen satis intelligi poterat.” Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I, p. 90.
story. At the exoteric level, Gerald designed his anchorite to be a man of the Welsh; he is sealed inside a cell in Wales and can never depart. Wechelen has no taint of foreign learning; his only trip abroad was a pilgrimage to the holy land and he retained his ignorance of other tongues until after he had returned to Wales. God gave him Latin miraculously only upon his permanent enclosure in Wales, and this partial Latin bears the marks of Wechelen’s mother tongue (“Och! Och!”).\textsuperscript{460} By his association with such an autochthonous figure at a critical juncture in his life’s narrative, Gerald presented to the reader of the De Rebus a picture not only of conventional piety, but of a piety rooted in a place. Wechelen’s asceticism is Welsh; he is sealed with Welsh stones into a Welsh cell. The gift of the Latin tongue, the only thing “foreign” about Wechelen, required supernatural agency.

At the esoteric level, Wechelen’s partial Latinity serves several purposes. It likely helped the few who were intended to perform the esoteric reading of the story identify Gerald - whose Welsh was likely as ungrammatical as Wechelen’s Latin - with his double. In the chapters which follow, I will argue that the De Rebus a se Gestis was intended for a Welsh princely audience and that the content of the esoteric reading of the Wechelen story proves that Gerald had one particular native Welsh prince in mind when he wrote it. Gerald had called upon each of the most important princes of Pura Wallia during the St. David’s controversy; he was known to them and to their entourages. When, years later, these men read the De Rebus a se Gestis, Wechelen’s name, his

location at Llowes, and his partial Latinity each would have pointed them to Gerald, his authorial doppelganger.

Gerald also had political reasons to give Wechelen his partial Latinity. He needed to harmonize his bitter criticism of the Plantagenet policy of appointing non-Welsh speakers to Welsh sees with his own limitations in the Welsh tongue. Robert Bartlett pointed to the obvious hypocrisy of Gerald’s complaints in this regard. Welsh readers of the De Rebus a se Gestis familiar enough with Gerald to identify Wechelen as his double would have been able to understand the anchorite’s partial Latinity as a defense of Gerald’s own adequacy, if not proficiency, in their tongue. Wechelen said his ungrammatical Latin was “such that I can be understood and understand others” tantum ut intelligi possem et alios intelligere; this was likely a fair description of Gerald’s limited proficiency in Welsh.

Finally, it is possible that the normally humorless archdeacon was making a joke at his own expense.\(^{461}\) Gerald could be brutal on the subject of churchmen who did not master Latin. He accused Hubert Walter of falling into heresy as a result of the archbishop’s meager proficiency in Latin and once attempted to subject the abbot of Dogmael to a humiliating public test of his literacy.\(^{462}\) No church doctrine, however, would have been imperiled by Gerald having only a limited and ungrammatical command of the Welsh tongue. This might have made it something he could laugh at himself.

\(^{461}\) For Gerald’s humorlessness, see Bartlett, p. 212.
\(^{462}\) Abbot of Dogmael, *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera III*, p. 234; Hubert Walter, *De Invect.*, pp. 100-101; see also, Butler, pp. 282-283.
about.

I must concede that I am entirely alone in such an interpretation of Wechelen’s ungrammatical Latin. Indeed, two authorities in the field of medieval Latin literacy have both understood the Wechelen story as a literal depiction of an historical anchorite, and both of these scholars have offered similar interpretations of Wechelen’s ungrammatical Latin. M. T. Clanchy explained Wechelen’s rough Latin by comparing it to the informal learning of Godric of Finchale: “Gerald of Wales gives an example of another hermit and traveler, Wecheleu, who had likewise miraculously learned Latin by ear. The fact that such knowledge was considered miraculous suggests, however, that Latin was thought difficult to learn without formal instruction in grammar.”463 Similarly Michael Richter, who has published extensively not only on Gerald of Wales, but also in the discipline of socio-linguistics, wrote in his monograph *Sprache und Gesellschaft in England im 12. Jahrhundert*:

Of his Welsh mother tongue we hear only the exclamation, “Och, Och,” but Giraldus reported in detail how Wechelen had acquired the Latin language, and he tried to make use of the exact words of the hermit himself. Wechelen spoke in the infinitive and only inadequately mastered case endings; Gerald’s sensitive and realistic account shows him at the peak of his narrative art.... It is not significant that Gerald’s narrative style does not exactly out and that, in the course of the episode, the recluse actually does use verb endings and that case endings occur constantly throughout. The important fact in our context is that Wechelen carried on a conversation in the Latin language with Gerald and also with his Priest. It should also be emphasized that before this enlightenment happened to him, he felt his lack of knowledge a deficiency because he could not fully participate in the church service.464

463 Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record* pp. 239-240.

Richter is correct that Wechelen’s speech as “transcribed” in the De Rebus does not really conform to how Gerald described it: “always with infinitives not observing the cases.” ⁴⁶⁵ Wechelen’s speech does not really disregard cases and it is not perfectly uniform in the use of the infinitive. Furthermore, Richter was correct in pointing out that Wechelen, in the last sentence of his explanation of how he attained this limited Latin ability, “sums up using finite verb forms.” ⁴⁶⁶ Richter interpreted these inconsistencies between Gerald’s description of Wechelen’s grammar and his ostensible transcription of the anchorite’s speech as evidence that Gerald was attempting to convey as best he could, in a “sensitive and realistic” way, the ungrammatical Latin of a rustic anchorite.

It seems unlikely to me, however, that Wechelen’s grammar - as described and as “transcribed” by Gerald - reflects the speech patterns of someone who picked up Latin piecemeal and without formal instruction. I would suggest, instead, that Wechelen’s Mittersprache hören wir nur den Ausruf, >Och, och<, aber Giraldus berichtet ausführlich, wie Wecheleu die lateinische Sprache erworben hatte, unter er versuchte, sich exakt der Worte des Eremiten selbst zu bedienen. Wecheleu sprach in Infinitiven und beherrschte Kasusendungen nur unzureichend; Giralds feinfühliger und realistischer Bericht zeigt ihn auf der Höhe seiner Erzählkunst… Es spiel kaum eine Rolle, daß Giraldus seinen Erzählstil nicht ganz durchhält und daß der Klausner im Laufe des Berichtes tatsächlich Verbindungen benutzte, während Kasusendungen da rund vorkommen. Wichtiger ist in unserem Zusammenhang die Tatsache, daß Wecheleu sowohl mit Giraldus als auch mit seinem Priester Gespräche in lateinischer Sprache führte. Auch sei betont, daß er vor der ihm widerfahrenen Erleuchtung seine fehlenden Lateinkenntnisse als Mangel empfand, weil er nicht voll am Gottesdienst teilnehmen konnte.”

⁴⁶⁵ “loquendi modus semper per infinitivum nec casus servabat” Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I, p. 90.

speech reflects a clever grammatical conceit dreamed up by his creator. Gerald
“transcribed” Wechelen’s speech using the correct case endings – in blatant contradiction
to his own description of the anchorite’s speech – because the mechanics of Latin
grammar are such that a uniform failure to distinguish between case endings would have
rendered the anchorite’s speech totally unintelligible. More revealing are Wechelen’s
verbal constructions: he is almost perfectly consistent in incorrectly using the correct
infinitive. Below, I have excerpted Wechelen’s account of how he got his Latin,
italicizing every use of the infinitive and marking with bold type all other verbal
constructions:

Ego,” inquit, “*ire* Hierosolimam et *visitare* sepulchrum Domini mei, et quando
*redire*, *ego ponere* me in hoc carcere pro amore Domini mei qui *mori* pro me. Et
multum *ego dolere*, quod non *posse intelligere* Latinum neque missam nec
evangélium; et multotiens *flere* et *rogare* Dominum *dare* mihi Latinum
*intelligere*. Tandem vero cum uno die hora * comedendi vocare* ad fenestram
serventem meum semel et iterum et pluries, et non *venire*; propter taedium simul
et famem *ego dormire* et quando *vigilare*, *ego videre* super altare meum panem
*jacere*. Et *accedens benedicere* panem et *comedere*; et statim ad vespertas ego
*intelligere* versus et verba Latina quae *dicere* sacerdos, et mane similiter ad
missam sicut mihi *videbatur*. Et post missam ego *vocare* presbyterum ad
fenestram cum missali, et *rogare* ipsum *legere* evangelium illius diei. Et ipsa
*legere* et *ego exponere*; et *dicere* sacerdos quod recte; et postea *loqui* cum
presbytero Latinum, et ipsa mecum. Et ab illo die ego *sic loqui*; et Dominus
meus, qui *dedit* mihi Latinam linguam, non *dedit* eam mihi per grammaticam aut
per casus, sed tantum ut *intelligi possem* et alios *intelligere.*

Note that, according to Gerald’s supposed transcription of Wechelen’s speech, the
anchorite manages to render in the correct (passive) form the infinitives of the deponent
verbs “*mori*” and “*loqui*.” Note also that the anchorite – with no formal grammatical
training - manages to form the correct infinitive for the difficult irregular verbs “*ire*” and

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467 *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I*, pp. 90-91. I bolded “*legere*” because it is correctly used.
“posse.” The fact that Wechelen is able to recognize that deponent and passive infinitives are formed differently than regular verbs in the active infinitive does not suggest that he acquired his Latin informally. Indeed, it seems unlikely that one who learned his Latin by overhearing it used at Mass would, with almost perfect consistency, prefer the infinitive form. It seems still more unlikely that Wechelen would, at the same time, manage to form correctly each of these ungrammatically deployed infinitives. It seems most unlikely that a man who could use only the infinitive—and who never managed to learn how to use the present and perfect tenses—could correctly use participles (accedens, comedendi). Would not one who learned Latin by overhearing the liturgy and the conversation of clerics utilize (both correctly and incorrectly) a hodgepodge of tenses according to what he overheard most frequently? The simple present and perfect forms seem to be better candidates for both use and misuse by someone who learned Latin without any proper grammatical instruction than does the infinitive. After all, in typical Latin syntax the infinitive is not employed with anything like the frequency of the simple present or perfect forms. Furthermore, the correct use of participles would seem to be entirely out of the reach of such a person.

Richter noted that Wechelen, at the conclusion of his explanation of how he had been miraculously granted the Latin language, conjugated his verbs correctly; he seems to have accepted this as evidence that Gerald had trouble consistently reproducing Wechelen’s ungrammatical Latin. Once again, there is room for a different interpretation. Wechelen’s use of “dedit” rather than “dare” at the end of his story ought to be considered together with the correct grammar he used earlier in the same paragraph.
Only a few lines earlier, Wechelen managed to use correctly a verbal adjective, “accedens;” a verbal noun, “comedendi;” and the imperfect passive of “video,” “videbatur.” These incidences of correct – even sophisticated – verbal forms all occur in places where Wechelen’s consistent use of the infinitive-only speech pattern *would have made it impossible to understand him*.

If one accepts that Wechelen existed, these inconsistencies might point only to a problem Gerald had in transcribing the Latin speech of an unlearned man. But because the weight of the evidence suggests that Wechelen was a literary creation of Gerald’s, the hypothesis that Gerald stumbled while attempting to transcribe realistically the anchorite’s ungrammatical speech must yield to a literary explanation. The inconsistencies between how Gerald described and how he ostensibly transcribed Wechelen’s speech occurred because Gerald chose to sacrifice consistency in his (un)grammatical conceit for narrative clarity; consistently preserving Wechelen’s grammatical idiosyncrasies was less important to Gerald than was the ability of his reader to follow what the anchorite character said. Gerald wrote that Wechelen “was able to be understood well enough” despite his bad grammar.\(^{468}\) Truly ungrammatical Latin, spoken without regard for cases and tenses, would not have been at all easy to understand – it would have been an unintelligible mess.

Perhaps, at least for the esoteric reader of the Wechelen story, Gerald meant for the anchorite’s speech to be an elaborate joke. For such readers, Wechelen’s speech must have been amusing; read aloud, it probably sounded hilarious. While Richter reckons

\(^{468}\) “…et tamen satis intelligi poterat.” *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera* I, p. 90.
Gerald’s representation of Wechelen’s ungrammatical speech “sensitive and realistic,” I would suggest that perhaps Gerald carefully crafted what H.E. Butler called Wechelen’s “diverting idiom” to be over-the-top and humorous. Indeed in my English rendering of the passage, I was tempted to emphasize my belief that Wechelen’s speech is a grammarian’s joke by translating each of his infinitive verbs using the English “full” or “to” infinitive rather than the “bare” infinitive. I refrained from doing so only because the anchorite’s speech became too hard to read when each infinitive was accompanied by “to;” if Gerald did not sacrifice clarity for consistency with his grammatical conceit in Latin, I did not want to do so in English.

Wechelen’s speech is hardly the only example of Gerald making grammarian’s jokes. He gave a lot of thought to language and grammar, as the evidence of his comparisons between tongues suggests, and he found grammatical errors very funny. In the Gemma Ecclesiastica, Gerald packed two chapters with humorous stories of the grammatical blunders made by churchmen lacking a respectable competency in Latin. In a speech before the pope, Gerald regaled his audience with three of Hubert Walter’s most embarrassing Latin blunders. In light of the high value Gerald placed on Latin literacy in anyone who presumed to shepherd souls, Wechelen’s grammar, at least in the esoteric reading of the story, should probably be understood as an elaborate literary joke rather than the realistic rendering of a rustic’s speech.

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469 Butler, p. 124.

470 Gemma, pp. 259-265; Giraldi Cambrensis Opera II, pp. 341-348.

471 De Invect., pp. 100-101; see also Butler, pp. 282-283.
Further evidence that Wechelen is an author stand-in for Gerald is found at the end of the Wechelen story, where the anchorite asks his archdeacon for spiritual advice:

Nevertheless, he had once sought counsel from the archdeacon, whether or not he ought – as certain monks of the Cistercian order had advised him - to push away the lame and the blind and those afflicted by various illnesses coming to him in order that he might, through the window, lay hands on them and cure them. He received the answer that he ought not to suppress the grace of healing given to him by God, but rather he ought to share it with those begging and needing it. However, he ought to take the greatest care that no pride or arrogance ooze into him as a consequence. Furthermore, the archdeacon recalled to his mind that gospel example of the disciples returning to Jesus and bragging, saying that the demons were subject to them; Jesus, to humble their pride responded: “Do not be glad that the spirits are subject to you, but rather be glad that your names have been written in heaven.”

The enthusiasm with which the Cistercians at Ford Abbey in Devon promoted the sanctity of Wulfic of Haselbury makes Gerald’s claim that Cistercians discouraged the ministrations of an anchorite at Llowes seem unlikely. When Wechelen is understood to be an author stand-in for Gerald, however, this passage makes perfect sense. If one were to list Gerald’s worst enemies, excluding Hubert Walter, almost all of them were...

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472 Quaesiverat autem aliquando ab archidiacono consilium; utrum claudos et caecos variisque languoribus afflicto ad ipsum venientes, ut manus per fenestram eis imponeret et curaret, a se repelleret; sicut monachi quidam Cisterciensis ordinis ei suaserant, necne? Qui responsum accepit; quod gratiam curationum sibi a Deo datam non supprimeret, sed petentibus et indigentibus eam caritativa potius impartiret. Veruntamen ne quid inde sibi superfiae surreperet aut arrogantiae summopere caveret. Illud etiam evangelicum ad mentem ei revocavit exemplum de discipulis revertentibus ad Jesum et gloriantibus dicendo, quod et daemonia eis fuerant subjecta; quibus ad arrogantiam deprimendam respondit Jesus: “Nolite gaudere quod spiritus vobis subjiciuntur; sed potius gaudete quod nomina vestra scripta sunt in coelis. (Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I, pp. 91-92.)

473 Please see p. 161.
monks and most were of the Cistercian order.⁴⁷⁴ During the St. David’s controversy, when Gerald wanted to raise capital for his ongoing legal appeal to Rome, he tried to pawn his precious books to the Cistercian abbey of Strata Florida; one of the monks, under the thinnest of legal pretexts, stole them outright.⁴⁷⁵ Adam, the Cistercian abbot of Dore in Herefordshire, outraged Gerald when he tried, unsuccessfully, to pre-empt Gerald’s 1199 election to St. David’s. Having heard of the death of Bishop Peter, Adam immediately absconded to the Continent with a large sum of money; he hoped to purchase the cash-starved King’s favor, and thus the see.⁴⁷⁶ Peter, the abbot of the Cistercian house of Whitland, had once been a friend of Gerald’s. However, while Gerald was in Rome defending his 1199 election, Peter betrayed his bishop-elect. The abbot had family among the canons of St. David’s. He suggested to Hubert Walter that his kinsmen might sway the chapter into a second election wherein they would choose himself rather than Gerald. Peter’s scheme succeeded, and fatally compromised Gerald’s prior election.⁴⁷⁷ Each of these Cistercian monks interfered in some way with Gerald’s attempts to minister to the see of St. David’s as her bishop. And had not the canons of this Welsh see “gone to his window” when they begged Gerald to leave off his life of

⁴⁷⁵ Giraldi Cambrensis Opera IV, pp. 155-6.
⁴⁷⁶ Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I, p. 104.
⁴⁷⁷ Knowles, “Some Enemies of Gerald of Wales” p. 39; Giraldi Cambrensis Opera IV, pp. 146-147.
study at Lincoln and accept their election?\(^{478}\)

**Wechelen’s Visionary Letter to Gerald**

If Wechelen is to be understood as an authorial double of Gerald - a literary creation rather than an historical personage - then a letter that Gerald claimed to have received from Wechelen (and which he included in two of the St David’s works) requires some explanation. Wechelen supposedly sent the letter to Gerald because he had experienced a supernatural vision concerning his archdeacon. Should the existence of this “correspondence” be interpreted as evidence that Wechelen was, in fact, an historic personage? Does the fact that Gerald appended this letter from Wechelen to two of his literary productions, not only the *De Rebus a se Gestis* but also the *De Invectionibus*, refute my contention that Wechelen is purely a literary figure?

The most direct answer to these questions – while correct - is also circular: if Gerald was willing to create Wechelen in order to accomplish his narrative and political purposes in the *De Rebus a se Gestis*, it should not be terribly surprising that Gerald was also willing to manufacture some “correspondence” from the anchorite. This circular argument presumes upon the evidence I have already presented in this chapter; however, it can be augmented in two ways. First, a careful consideration of both the letter itself and its placement in the two St. David’s works yields nothing in the way of concrete

\(^{478}\) It is, perhaps, significant that in the very next chapter Gerald describes his having given alms to the poor of Lincoln during a famine, after hearing them “at the doors and windows of his dwelling” *ad fores et fenestras hospitii*. *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I*, p. 94.
evidence that the anchorite of Llowes actually existed. Secondly, a brief consideration of Gerald’s willingness, in his writings, to harness the charisma of holy men to his own ends suggests a certain boldness not incommensurate with the production of useful correspondence from a manufactured holy man.

In the Wechelen story, Gerald claimed that the anchorite of Llowes was not only his friend, but also his spiritual correspondent:

Now he [Wechelen] loved the archdeacon most tenderly, to such a degree that he related (in secret) his visions and revelations made to him from heaven, and when he was away and far off, desiring (out of a feeling of great love) to share all things with him, he sent them written down on a roll. And so the holiness and beatitude of the man, beloved and chosen by God, had been revealed by many signs and mighty works in his life and many more, from heaven, after his death.  

One of these “visions and revelations” was included in the De Rebus in Book III, chapter ccxxxv. The extant chapter heading reads: “Visio XXVII, sc. De Anchorita de Locheis, et visio XXVIII similiter similem habentes expositionem.”  

While Book III of the De Rebus is lost after chapter xix, Wechelen’s visionary letter survives because Gerald copied the entire chapter straight into Book VI of one of the other two St. David’s works, the De Invectionibus. Indeed the chapter that includes Wechelen’s vision, chapter xx,  

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479 Diligebat autem archidiaconum tenerrime; adeo ut visiones suas et revelationes sibi divinitus factas et secreto proponeret, et cum absens atque remotus esset, grandi dilectionis affectu cuncta vo ens ei communicare scriptas in rotulis destinaret. Multis itaque signis et virtutibus in vita sua multoque pluribus post obitum ipsius fuerat divinitus viri Deo dilecti et electi sanctitas atque felicitas declarata. Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I, p. 92.

480 Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I, p. 18. The other vision mentioned in the title is very brief, and not attributed to Wechelen.

481 Spec Duo., xxi; De Invent., pp. 204-237.
is but one of twenty-one chapters of visionary material that Gerald had first included at
the end of Book III of the *De Rebus a se Gestis*, and later, c. 1216, copied straight into
Book VI of the *De Inventionibus*.482

It is, therefore, possible to find Wechelen in the Geraldine corpus outside of the
*De Rebus a se Gestis*. Nevertheless, I do not believe this constitutes evidence that
Wechelen was anything more than a literary device Gerald created for the *De Rebus*. It
seems fairly obvious that the letter from Wechelen only found its way into the *De
Inventionibus* because all twenty-one chapters of the visionary material at the end of the
*De Rebus* were copied, as a group, into that later work. The Wechelen story on the other
hand, i.e. Book III chapter ii of the *De Rebus a se Gestis*, is not found anywhere else in
Gerald’s literary productions. If Gerald had written anything about Wechelen in any of
the likely places I listed earlier in this chapter - or if he had repeated the Wechelen story
in either of the other two St. David’s works - this might suggest that the anchorite of
Llowes was something besides Gerald’s purpose-built literary creation. However, he did
not. The existence of the supposed letter from Wechelen in the *De Inventionibus* would
seem to be entirely the result of the mere repetition of identical material from the *De
Rebus*.

482 According to the extant chapter headings for the *De Rebus*, this visionary material
constituted Book III chapters ccxviii to cccxxviii. *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I*, p. 18.
They appear in the *De Inventionibus* as Book VI, chapters iii-xxiv. *De Invent.*, pp. 207-
Michael Richter dates the completion of the *De Inventionibus* to 1216 at the earliest,
because there is some evidence that Book V was written after Pope Innocent III (d. 15
We learn nothing new about Wechelen from reading this visionary letter. It survives in Book VI chapter xx of the *De Invectionibus* alongside Gerald’s exposition of the vision and a brief and rather vague passage alluding to similar visions experienced by other, unnamed, persons. Wechelen’s letter is entirely devoted to this vision, which is itself little more than a symbolic rehashing of the exoteric layer of the Wechelen story:

…the anchorite of Llowes, a good man, saw a vision concerning Gerald, which he afterwards himself divulged by his own letter to him whom he loved. “Wecheleu, anchorite of Llowes, to my most beloved friend, health and benediction. I disclose this thing to you, which transpired on the holy Paschal day. I saw a vision and I will tell this to you, namely, that in a boundless land I saw a great fissure before me and I bent down toward it and in the boundless land I saw you, one may know, in the deep fissure celebrating over the altar. I spoke to you, wearing honorable vestment, and I cried your name to you and said, “Rise up, Rise up, Rise up, Gerald, ascend to me up over the land,” and you responded to me, “Lord, because you have called me I will come to you,” and from step to step you walked all the way to me over the land and you said to me, “I have been in prison and because you called me henceforth I will be at rest,” and I have great joy in my heart because you are free of prison. Be well.”

In the same chapter, Gerald appended his own exposition of this vision:

Therefore, the fact that he saw him, as though he had been engulfed in the deepest ground as though absorbed in secular and earthly things, can designate him as one panting after these things. The fact that he was dressed in vestments and celebrating divine things, can be referred to increasing as much as possible his

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483 Item visionem vidit de Giraldo vir bonus anachorita de Locheis, quam et litteris suis ei quem diligebat postea sic propalavit. Karissimo amico meo Wedheleu anacorita de Locheis in Christo salutem et benedictionem. Hoc manifesto vobis, quod in die sancto Pasche transacto vidi somnium et illud vobis narrabo, scilicet quod in profundum terre vidi magnum foramen ante me et inclinavi ad illud, et in profundum terre te vidi, scilicet in profundo foramine celebrantem super altare, te dico honorabilem vestem habentem, et nomine tuo clamavi ad te et dixi. Surge, surge, surge, Giralde, ascende ad me sursum super terram, et mihi respondisti, Domine, quia vocasti me veniam ad te, et de gradu ad gradum ambulasti usque ad me super terram et mihi dixisti. In carcere fui et quia vocasti me, amodo habebo requiem, et magnam leticiam in corde meo habui, quod solutus fuisti de carcere. Valete *De Invect.*, pp. 220-221.
final repentance and good zeal and eager care concerning the church of Christ, and enlarging the priestly office by every effort, and adorning not a little the sacrament of the altar. The fact that he summoned him on high from the depths, and when he ascended from there, he had the joy as if a friend released from prison, can designate that he happily attained to correction and higher ascent, God cooperating (or more correctly bringing it about entirely), by the prayers and merits of that holy man and other similar ones to whose prayers he was accustomed to diligently and faithfully entrust himself.  

In the vision, Wechelen and Gerald play the same spiritual roles they played in the exoteric layer of the Wechelen story. Wechelen claims that he encouraged Gerald, already clad in liturgical garments but standing in a deep in a fissure in the ground, to ascend to him; Gerald did so, and then told Wechelen that he felt as though he had been freed from prison. In his exposition of the vision, Gerald claims that Wechelen’s vision referred to his own ascent from earthly things to spiritual improvement and also that he had indeed begun to improve - in large measure because of the prayers of the anchorite and others like him. In the exoteric layer of the Wechelen story, Gerald comes to visit the anchorite having previously been mired in the “deep fissure” of the court, but nevertheless a faithful cleric determined to engage in theological study. Wechelen both rebukes and encourages Gerald – thus calling on him to rise up to a higher spiritual

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484 Quod ergo vidit eum, in imo terre secularibus et terrenis quibus quasi absortus fuerat, ad hoc inhiantem potuit designare. Quod autem sacerdotalibus indutum et divina celebran tem, ad emendacionem eius finalem, zelumque bonum et tam intensionem circiter ecclesie Christi cultum pro posse augmentandum, et sacerdotale officium totis nisibus amplificandum, altarisque sacramentum non mediocrer exornandum referri potuit. Quod ab imis vocavit eum sursum, unde et cum ascenderet de amico tanquam e carcere liberato leticiam habuit, designare potuit, quod precibus et meritis sancti viri illius aliorumque similium, quorum oracionibus valde diligenter et devote se committere consueverat, ad emendacionem ac superius ascensionem, Deo cooperante immo totum efficiente, feliciter accessit. De Invect., p. 221.
position – and Gerald, in turn, begs Wechelen to pray for him. The material is, in essence, identical.

While the spiritual message of both Wechelen’s vision and the exoteric layer of the Wechelen story are identical, there is one noticeable difference between the two passages. Even though Wechelen’s vision was supposed to have been “divulged … by his own letter,” the anchorite’s grammar has dramatically improved! In Wechelen’s visionary letter, the (un)grammatical conceit Gerald developed for Wechelen’s speech in Book III chapter ii of the De Rebus has been dropped entirely. True the Latin of anchorite’s letter is very simple, but the consistently ungrammatical use of the infinitive has been replaced by the correct use of verb tenses and endings.

Why would Gerald manufacture correspondence from his imaginary anchorite? In part, I suspect, appending “correspondence” from the anchorite of Llowes to the De Rebus a se Gestis helped Gerald to conceal the esoteric layer of the Wechelen story. By “confirming” Wechelen’s existence with “documentary evidence,” Gerald could better conceal from the many who might read the work the anchorite’s esoteric role as an author stand-in.

I have another theory as well, which I put forward tentatively, acknowledging that more research needs to be done. In my extensive reading of Gerald’s literary corpus, I have been surprised to discover that he seems quite comfortable manipulating hagiographical tropes for the benefit of his own career. He is particularly wont to appropriate to himself the charisma of ascetical holy men without bothering much with
personal renunciation.\textsuperscript{485} The creation of a holy man for the purpose of self-promotion and the manufacture of correspondence from such a creation does seem to fit with similar literary appropriations of charisma elsewhere in the Geraldine corpus. I will limit myself to two examples.

In some places in his writings, Gerald appropriates the ascetical charisma of holy men to shield himself from the potential consequences of his own intemperate remarks. Perhaps the best example of this phenomenon is found in the \textit{De Principis Instructione}, where Gerald attributes a truly shocking and scatological anti-Plantagenet “vision” to the famous northern hermit Godric of Finchale (d. 1170). The passage reads:

We have also thought it right to introduce here a vision of Saint Godric, a renowned hermit, whose life and conversation have adorned the parts of the north of England in our own days... for it seemed to him that when he had entered into a certain church, he saw king Henry and his four sons grown up to manhood, as though prostrate before the altar, who also afterwards rising up began to wipe the altar-pall, and the linen cloths, and as if to shake off the dust. Then climbing upon the altar, they wiped the dust from the feet and legs of the crucifix. But at length, ascending above the crucifix, and sitting for some time, and at last, horrible to relate, they began to defile the altar on every side with their urine and excrement. And instantly he saw the king, together with his two sons, Richard and John, falling down headlong from above, before the altar, with a great crash, so that with horror he beheld them dashed to pieces there, and miserably deprived of life, while the two others had vanished from his sight. The good man himself thus explained this vision: that they seemed to pray, and to wipe the altar and the image of the crucifix, because they were careful to preserve peace in the kingdom for their poor subjects; but when they climbed upon the altar and the crucifix, they thereby represented the oppression of the church, which had been and would be

\textsuperscript{485} I am particularly interested in attempting to find other examples of twelfth or thirteenth century writers manipulating charismatic tropes in the pursuit of private – not corporate or party - ambitions. If Gerald is unique in this, and I suspect that he may be, I would like to analyze his manipulations in light of the late University of Pennsylvania sociologist Philip Rieff’s vigorous dissent from Max Weber on the nature and workings of charisma. See Philip Rieff, \textit{Charisma} (New York: Pantheon Books, 2007).
exercised by them. The ruin of the king, and of his two sons who reigned after him, pointed out the divine vengeance which should be taken upon them.\footnote{Giral
di Cambrensis Opera VIII, p. 313.}

This scatological vision does not appear in Reginald of Durham’s massive \textit{Libellus de vita miraculis S. Godrici, heremita
de Finchale}. Indeed Reginald, despite his open partisanship in favor of Thomas of Canterbury, conscientiously recorded in his \textit{vita} that Henry II had made a pious gift to Godric.\footnote{Reginald of Durham, \textit{Libellus de Vita et Miraculis S. Godrici, Heremita
de Finchale}, ed. Joseph Stevens (London: Surtees Society, 1847), p. 302.} Neither does this vision appear in the more modest \textit{Vita Godrici} of Geoffrey of Coldingham.\footnote{Geoffrey of Coldingham, \textit{Vita Godrici} AA. SS. Maii V (1685), pp. 70-85.} This is particularly significant because Gerald knew Geoffrey’s \textit{Vita Godrici}; in the \textit{Gemma Ecclesiastica}, he quoted an edifying passage from Geoffrey’s \textit{Vita} describing Godric’s austerities.\footnote{Gemma, pp. 164-5.}

Indeed, I have not been able to find the scatological vision that Gerald attributed to Godric anywhere outside the \textit{Gemma Ecclesiastica}. This is clearly a case of Gerald’s placing his own view – arch-Gregorianism curdled by a bitter hatred of Henry II and his sons - into the mouth of an ascetical holy man whose charisma gave him the moral authority to make such dangerous pronouncements.

If Gerald was willing to “borrow” the authority of charismatic holy men by putting words in their mouths, he was also willing to appropriate the supernatural expression of charisma to himself. Consider the way Gerald described the effect of his preaching at Haverfordwest in Spring, 1188. In the \textit{Itinerarium Kambriae}, where Gerald
first described his oratorical triumph, he stopped just short of ascribing miraculous power
to his own preaching:

In Haverfordwest first the Archbishop himself gave a sermon, and then the word
of God was preached with some eloquence by the Archdeacon of St. David’s, the
man whose name appears on the title-page of this book, in short by me. A great
crowd of people assembled, some of them soldiers, others civilians. Many found
it odd and some, indeed, thought it little short of miraculous, that when I, the
Archdeacon, preached the word of God, speaking first in Latin and then in
French, those who could not understand a word of either language were just as
much moved to tears as the others, rushing forward in equal numbers to receive
the sign of the Cross.  

When Gerald repeated the story years later, in Book II chapter viii of the De Rebus a se
Gestis, he drew an explicit parallel between his own preaching and the miraculous
sermonizing of the twelfth-century’s most famous contemporary saint, Bernard of
Clairvaux.  

Moreover, many were amazed that, though the Archdeacon spoke only in French
and Latin, the common people who knew neither tongue wept in untold numbers
no less than the rest and more than two hundred ran all together to receive the sign
of the Cross. The like also befell in Germany in the case of the blessed Bernard,
who speaking to Germans in the French tongue of which they were wholly
ignorant, filled them with such devotion and compunction, that he called forth
floods of tears from their eyes and with the greatest ease softened the hardness of

490 Journey, p. 141. “Apud Haverfordiam itaque primo ab archipraesule sermone facto
deinde ab archidiacono Menevensi cujus nomen praesentis opusculi titulus tenet verbo
Domini gratiose prolato turbae allecta est multitudo tam militaris quam plebiae. Ubi et
pro mirando et quasi pro miraculo ducebatur a multis quod ad verbum Domini ab
archidiacono prolatum cum tamen lingua Latina et Gallica loqueretur non minus illi qui
neutram linguam noverunt, quam alii tam ad lacrimarum affluentiam moti fuerunt quam
etiam ad crucis signaculum catervatim accurrerunt.” Giraldi Cambrensis Opera VI, pp.
82-83.

491 The story of Bernard preaching successfully to the Germans was preserved by
Geoffrey, Bernard’s secretary and a monk of Clairvaux, in the third book of the Vita
Bernardi Prima. (PL CLXXXV, col. 0307B).
their hearts so that they did and believed all that he told them; and yet when an interpreter faithfully set forth to them in their own tongue everything that he said, they were not at all moved thereat. Wherefore at the sermon’s close, when the Archdeacon sat down again, a certain Hospitaller who sat near him said to him, “In truth the Holy Spirit has manifestly spoken by your mouth this day.”

It should not be too surprising that someone willing to appropriate the sacred for his own purposes would also be willing to fabricate correspondence from an invented ascetical solitary.

\[492\] Butler, p. 101-2; Praeterea pro re miranda multi ducebant et obstupebant, cum archidiaconus lingua tantum Gallica loqueretur et Latina, quod non minus vulgares qui neutram linguam noverant, quam caeteri ad verbum ipsius flebant innumeris et ad crucis signaculum plures quam ducenti concurrebant. Simile contigit in Alemannia de beato Bernardo; qui verbum Domini Teutonicus faciens lingua Gallica, quam penitus ignorabant, tantam eis devotionem incussit et compunctionem ut et ab oculis eorum lacrimarum affluentiam, et ad cuncta quae suadebat vel facienda vel credenda facillime cordium eorum duritiam emolliret; cum tamen ad interpretis sermonem eis lingua sua singula fideliter exponentis nihil omnino moti fuissent. Ex quo patet virtute divina Spiritu interius operante et corda perlustrante, tam hic quam ibi rebus quoque plus qua verbis actum fuisset. Unde et finito sermone, cum archidiaconus, qui standing locutus fuerat, se in sessione recipieret, vir quidam hospitalaris qui prope consederat, dixit ei verbum istud: “Vere Spiritus Sanctus Hodie manifete locutus est ore vestro.” Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I, p. 76.
Chapter 4: The Esoteric Reading of the Wechelen Story, Part II

Having unmasked Wechelen as an author stand-in for Gerald, it remains only to unmask his antagonists, the “Devil” and the “woman disguised as a nun,” and to explain why Gerald constructed such an elaborate literary device. Because the answer to all these questions can be found in the Painscastle section of the Wechelen story, it is necessary to repeat it verbatim here:

Now it happened that the Welsh besieged Painscastle in Elfael (built a short time before). And when a multitude of the English army had been assembled at Hay and thereabouts, a certain woman disguised as a nun came to them - as though she had been sent by the aforementioned anchorite – advising them and counseling them on his part so that they would join the Welsh in battle without fear, promising them certain victory. And because they had faith in him as a holy man, it was done, and in one day around three thousand of the Welsh fell. When word had spread throughout the entire province, the archdeacon came to visit his friend the anchorite (which he would do most gladly when opportunity permitted), who at once, among other things, reported to him concerning this talk. And he was greatly pained that such talk should be spread around concerning himself; swearing, furthermore, that he had never given any such instruction to the English or even knew about it. Indeed he said, just as he ought, that he would prefer to advise against rather than to advocate such combat between Christians, from which the shedding of blood would arise. He said that the Devil, on account of the perdition of many which he foresaw as a consequence and the great profit in souls that would come to him out of this conflict, procured that such a message should come to the English as though from him whom they considered trustworthy; and the angel of Satan - in order that she might defame him as the author and instigator of the slaughter - transformed herself, as if into an angel of light.\(^\text{493}\)

\(^{493}\) “Contigit autem Walenses castellum Pagani in Elevein paulo ante constructum obsedisse; et cum multitudo Anglicani exercitus apud Haiam et circa partes illas collecta
In Chapter Two, I pointed out that while it is not particularly strange that Wechelen should deny that he had any part in encouraging the English attack at Painscastle, the way that he denied it was very peculiar:

Wechelen’s version of events is not that he knows nothing about Painscastle, or that he is ignorant of military matters, or that he is too obscure for his word to weigh heavily in the counsels of powerful Plantagenet courtiers. Wechelen’s defense against the hostile rumor in circulation among the Welsh is instead that he did not tell the English to attack Painscastle, but that someone else did in his name. That is to say, Wechelen does not deny that he could have exercised influence over the English, indeed the anchorite accepts that the English attacked the Welsh under the impression that he had urged them to do so.  

For the entire Painscastle section of the Wechelen story to become far less incredible, one need only substitute Gerald for Wechelen. While an anchorite accused in meddling in worldly affairs might be expected to defend himself by pleading ignorance in matters of state, it would have been ridiculous for Gerald to deny such knowledge. Years before

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fuisset venit ad eos mulier quaedam quasi sub specie monialis et tanquam ab anchorita praeedicto transmissa, monens illos ex parte ipsius et consulens, quatinus cum Walensibus secure congrederentur, certam eis victoriam promittendo. Et quoniam fides habebatur ei tanquam viro sancto, ita factum est; et ecciderunt uno die de Walensibus circiter tria millia. Cum autem divulgatum esset verbum istud per totam provinciam illam, venit archidiaconus amicum suum anachoritam visitare; quod libentissime nacta opportunitate faciebat; qui statim inter caetera retulit ei de verbo illo. Et quia multum dolebat tale verbum de ipso disseminatum fussse; jurans etiam se nunquam tale quid Anglicis mandasse vel innotuisse. Dicebat enim, sicut et decebat, se potius talem conflictum inter Christianos unde sanguinis effusio proveniret, dissuadere velle quam monere. Dicebat autem Diabolum propter perditionem multorum, quam inde providit, et lucrum animarum magnum sibi venturum ex hoc conflictu, tale mandatum tanquam ab ipso, cui fides habebatur, Anglicis ut veniret procurasse, et ut ipsum etiam quasi caedis auctorem et instigatorem diffamaret, angelum Satanae se tanquam in lucis angelum transformasse.”

(Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I, pp. 91-92)

494 Please see Chapter Two, pp. 147-8.
Painscastle, Gerald had not only written a history of the conquest of Ireland, but he had also, in his *Descriptio Kambriae*, penned advice to the Welsh in resisting the English and advice to the English on how to conquer the Welsh. More importantly, Gerald was a (former) courtier who was still, in 1198, receiving a stipend from the crown.\(^{495}\) While a Welsh anchorite might be expected to argue that he was too obscure to send military advice to English commanders, it would have been absurd for Gerald to claim this. Gerald had conducted his last embassy to native Welsh princes on behalf of the English monarch only five years before the battle at Painscastle. Indeed whatever the archbishop of Canterbury’s personal feelings about Gerald, the former courtier and emissary’s word would have weighed heavily in the counsels of Hubert Walter and Geoffrey fitz Peter for precisely this reason. Finally, in the Wechelen story the anchorite cannot distance himself from the Painscastle disaster by pleading ignorance or obscurity because his double, Gerald, was neither obscure to the English curia nor ignorant of their doings. The esoteric message of the Wechelen story is, therefore, that *Gerald* was the subject of a hostile rumor among the Welsh to the effect that he had encouraged the English attack at Painscastle. The Wechelen story is the vehicle for *Gerald’s* vehement denial that he had offered sanguinary counsel to the English on the eve of the battle. What then, at the esoteric layer of the Wechelen story, was Gerald claiming really happened before the battle of Painscastle? Who are the “woman disguised as a nun” and “the Devil?”

\(^{495}\) Bartlett, p. 19, n. 39.
Wechelen’s Antagonists

It is of the utmost importance that the Painscastle section of the Wechelen story be understood as having three *dramatis personae*: Wechelen the anchorite, “the Devil” and the “woman disguised as a nun” (who is also referred to as an “angel of Satan”). Not only does conflating “the Devil” together with the “woman disguised as a nun/angel of Satan” render the esoteric reading of the story impossible, it makes no sense at the exoteric level. And yet, this is precisely what has happened in the marginal notation of the Latin edition of the *De Rebus a se Gestis*, where the editor, J. S. Brewer, summarized the Wechelen story incorrectly: “Satan, in the shape of a nun, persuades an army of English to engage with the Welsh, pretending a commission from the anchorite.” A close reading of the text does not support Brewer’s conflating of the anchorite’s antagonists. Wechelen’s explanation of both how and why his antagonists accomplished their deception makes it clear that they are two different characters:

…the Devil, on account of the perdition of many which he foresaw as a consequence and the great profit in souls that would come to him out of this conflict, procured that such a message should come to the English as though from him whom they considered trustworthy; and the angel of Satan - in order that she might defame him as the author and instigator of the slaughter - transformed herself, as if into an angel of light.

Note each character’s discrete motivation. Should a battle take place, the Devil anticipated “the perdition of many” and a “great profit in souls” for himself. The “angel of Satan,” on the other hand, was motivated by the opportunity to “defame” Wechelen “as the author and instigator of such a slaughter.” Note also that the Devil “…procured

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496 *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I*, pp. 91-92.
that such counsel should come to the English as though from him whom they considered trustworthy” *tale mandatum tanquam ab ipso, cui fides habebatur, Anglicis ut veniret procurasse.* It is the use of *procurasse*, the syncopated perfect of the verb *procurare*, which must definitively separate the Devil from the “woman;” *procurare* carries the connotation of a deed accomplished by an agent or proxy.497

It is also important to understand that the “woman disguised as a nun” at the beginning of the Painscastle section of the Wechelen story is the same figure Gerald refers to as “the angel of Satan” at the end. Let us begin at the end: in the last clause of the Painscastle story, Wechelen explains that while the woman in the likeness of a nun was prompted to carry her rumor by diabolic agency, she disguised herself by her own evil power: *angelum Satanae se tanquam in lucis angelum transformasse.*498 This is a paraphrase of a familiar Bible verse, but both the words and the sense differ. In II Corinthians 11:13-14, Paul warned against false apostles: “For such false apostles are deceitful workmen, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light.”499 According to Paul, false apostles, *pseudoapostali*, transform themselves, *transfigurantes se*, into apostles of Christ. Paul then drew a spiritual parallel with the Devil; Satan transforms himself into


498 *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I*, p. 92.

499 “nam eiusmodi pseudoapostoli operarii subdoli transfigurantes se in apostolos Christi et non mirum ipse enim Satanas transfigurat se in angelum lucis.”
an angel of light Satanas transfigurat se in angelum lucis.

In the Wechelen story, however, it is not Satan who transforms himself into an angel of light, but an “angel of Satan:” angelum Satanae se tanquam in lucis angelum transformasse. Clearly, the angel of Satan cannot be the same person as Satan, himself. True, translating this story from Latin to English can introduce some confusion because of the grammatical fact that Latin language assigns a gender to every noun. This is illustrated by H. E. Butler’s translation, where he rendered angelum Satanae se tanquam in lucis angelum transformasse as “the angel of Satan had transformed himself, as it were, into an angel of light.” The Latin noun angelus, here in the accusative form angelum, is indeed masculine. Yet surely this messenger of Satan, this angelum Satanae, refers back to the mulier quaedam quasi sub specie monialis, the “woman in the likeness of the nun.” In his translation, Butler assigned too little significance to the context of the story and too much significance to the fact that angelus happens to be a masculine noun. This is a grammatical accident and it does not necessitate that the reflexive se be translated into English as “himself” any more than the grammatical oddity of Sathana taking the feminine endings would render Satan a “she” in English translation.

Regardless of the gender of the noun angelus, a grammatical accident, the context of the story dictates that the se in this last clause ought to be translated as herself: “the angel of Satan… transformed herself as if into an angel of light.” In the Wechelen story, the devil “procured” procurasse that his false message would come to the English; I wrote above that procurare carries the connotation of a deed accomplished by an agent or proxy. In the Wechelen story, the agent or proxy of the Devil who delivers the false
message to the English is the “woman disguised as a nun.” In the Christian cosmology, 
angels are supernatural messengers of God while demons are fallen angels, former 
messengers of God who now serve Satan. Therefore it is entirely reasonable that this 
“woman disguised as a nun,” a diabolic messenger, should also be referred to as an 
“angel of Satan.” In this way, Gerald has linked the *mulier quaedam quasi sub specie 
monialis* with the Devil and endowed her with demonic powers, while at the same time 
maintaining a firm distinction between Wechelen’s two antagonists. It is by disguising 
herself as a nun that the satanic messenger in the Wechelen story, the *angelum Sathanae*, 
transformed herself into an “angel of light,” *angelum lucis*.

Finally, before identifying the “woman disguised as a nun/angel of Satan” and the 
“Devil,” it is necessary to introduce two letters Gerald preserved from his private 
correspondence in his 1199 compilation, the *Symbolum Electorum*. Throughout the rest 
of this chapter I will make frequent recourse to these two important letters, so a brief 
introduction of these letters is necessary. Of the greatest importance in identifying the 
“woman disguised as a nun” is Letter I of the *Symbolum Electorum*, Gerald’s vitriolic 
1194 missive to the head of the abbot of Cîteaux denouncing one of his monks. Indeed, in Book III chapter vii of the *De Rebus a se Gestis*, Gerald explicitly referred his

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500 The medieval Christian view of the relationship between the Devil and demons 
evolved through the patristic period and became relatively settled by the time of Pope 
Gregory I. See Jeffery Burton Russell, *The Devil* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 
1977), pp. 252-255; *Satan* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), pp. 128-139; and 

501 *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I*, pp. 198-395.

readers to Letter I of the *Symbolum Electorum*.

The second of Gerald’s surviving letters helpful in identifying the “woman disguised as a nun” is numbered XXVIII in the *Symbolum Electorum*; Gerald wrote Letter XXVIII to Hubert Walter, archbishop of Canterbury in Fall of 1198 or early 1199. After the death of Peter de Leia, bishop of St. David’s, in July of 1198, but before Gerald’s election to that see in 1199, there was some correspondence between Gerald and Hubert Walter. This correspondence, numbered Letters XXV, XXVI, XXVII and XXVIII in the *Symbolum Electorum*, opens tactfully but ends with Gerald maintaining correctness without disguising his hostility.

I will draw on this series of letters below, while investigating the significance of Gerald’s having transcribed into the *De Rebus a se Gestis* Letters XXV, XXVI, XXVII while excluding Letter XXVIII.

The “Woman Disguised as a Nun/Angel of Satan”

While Gerald was prolix in his description of Wechelen and therefore prodigal in providing clues to his anchoritic double’s true identity, he was much more economical on the subject of the anchorite’s defamer. We must, therefore, isolate all four of her traits as each helps to unmask her. Wechelen’s defamer is a “woman,” *mulier*. She appears *sub specie monialis* “disguised as a nun.” This “woman” was motivated by a desire to defame Wechelen, so she deceitfully carried aggressive counsel to the English and falsely

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*Butler, p. 147; Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I, p. 103.*

*Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I, pp. 290-307.*

*Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I, pp. 289-307.*
attributed that advice to Wechelen. Finally, she is an *angelum Satanae se tanquam in lucis angelum transformasse*, “an angel of Satan who transformed herself into an angel of light.” It is my contention that this “woman” was actually a man - Gerald’s bitter enemy William Wibert, the Cistercian abbot of Biddlesden.

At first glance the abbot of an English monastery seems an unlikely candidate for the “woman disguised as a nun.” And yet, according to Gerald, William Wibert did not honor his vows of personal poverty and chastity nor did he observe the monastic principle of stability. Three of the letters Gerald included in the *Symbolum Electorum* indicate that it should not be surprising to find this particular abbot away from his monastery and mingling with men of considerable political importance. In Letter I, Gerald repeatedly charged that William Wibert never observed the monastic discipline of stability. Gerald claimed that Wibert first came to court after having been removed in disgrace from the office of cellarer at Biddlesden Abbey. Once at court, William attached himself to the most important curial magnate of the day, archbishop Hubert Walter. He did not give up haunting the curial court even after the royal influence he so assiduously cultivated had obtained for him the abbacy of Biddlesden - the very house he had deserted in disgrace.\footnote{Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I, p. 209.} Letter XXVIII proves that Wibert’s association with Hubert Walter continued after Gerald departed from the royal service (in 1194); in this letter Gerald mentioned an 1196 public reconciliation between himself and William that took place at Hubert Walter’s court in Oxford.\footnote{Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I, p. 294.} In 1198, Hubert Walter shared command of the army sent to
break the Welsh siege at Painscastle. Gerald never explicitly recorded that Wibert was present with the archbishop on this particular expedition. In Letter XXV, however, Gerald remonstrated with the archbishop for a public tirade against himself that the prelate had indulged in on the march of Wales immediately after the battle at Painscastle. In the De Rebus, Gerald attributed this archiepiscopal outburst to his own role in the deposition of Hubert’s familiaris William Wibert from his abbacy that same year; by denouncing William Wibert to the abbot of Cîteaux years earlier, Gerald was in large measure responsible for setting into motion the 1198 disciplinary action by the Cistercian order. 508

Not only was Wibert a familiar of Hubert Walter, he also had a record of intriguing in political affairs in Wales. Wibert had served in Gerald’s entourage on three of Gerald’s diplomatic missions from the English curia to the Lord Rhys of Deheubarth. In Letter I of the Symbolum Electorum, Gerald implied that Wibert requested a place in his entourage because of a particular interest in Wales. 509 While Gerald reported that Wibert was useless to him because he did not speak Welsh, this language barrier does not seem to have impeded Wibert’s scheming. 510 According to Gerald, Wibert intrigued with Peter de Leia to have the bishop of St. David’s translated to Worcester and to have himself elevated to the see of St. David’s. 511 This was not the only such scheme Wibert

508 Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I, p. 95
510 Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I, p. 204.
511 Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I, pp. 299-300.
indulged in; whenever he would learn of a vacancy in a Welsh see, he would arrogate to himself the title of bishop-elect. William tried this during vacancies at Bangor and at Llandaff.\textsuperscript{512} It is noteworthy that, at least according to Gerald, Wibert’s ambitions reached not only to St. David’s, a see situated at a center of Marcher strength, but as far into native Wales as Bangor. Wibert’s position in Gerald’s entourage and his client relationship to Hubert Walter must have given him some access to native Welsh elites not only in Deheubarth, but also in Gwynedd (Bangor) and Powys (Llandaff). Such access must have, in turn, fuelled his pretensions.

In the \textit{De Rebus a se Gestis}, Gerald mentioned Wibert elliptically and only three times. All three references to Wibert are in Book III (chapters iv, v, and vii), and all three link him to Hubert Walter. Indeed in chapters iv and v, Gerald attributed the archbishop’s enmity toward him to his denunciations of Wibert to the Abbot of Cîteaux. While nothing in the \textit{De Rebus a se Gestis} directly identifies Wibert as the “woman disguised as a nun,” Gerald did leave an important clue. In Book III chapter vii, only five chapters after the Wechelen story, Gerald wrote “…if any would read the letters of the Archdeacon against William Wibert, which he sent to the Abbot of Cîteaux, and the letters which he received in reply, let him turn to the book entitled \textit{Symbolum Electorum}.”\textsuperscript{513}

Gerald’s denunciation of Wibert to the Abbot of Cîteaux, written sometime


\textsuperscript{513} Butler, p. 147; \textit{Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I}, p, 103.
between 1194 and 1196, is Letter I of the *Symbolum Electorum*. When, almost twenty years later, Gerald wrote the Wechelen story, he designed Wechelen’s antagonist to mirror exactly the four most serious charges Gerald had made against William Wibert. This is why, in the Wechelen story, the anchorite is defamed by a “woman” “disguised” “as a nun.” Gerald’s additional characterization of this “woman disguised as a nun” as an “angel of Satan” also directly corresponds to something Gerald had written about William Wibert years earlier, in Letter XXVIII of the *Symbolum Electorum*.

That Wechelen’s antagonist is a slanderer is the first clue that the “woman disguised as a nun” is William Wibert. In his c. 1194 denunciation of William Wibert to his monastic superiors in Letter I of the *Symbolum Electorum*, Gerald lamented to the abbot of Cîteaux that his curial career had been brought to an end as a result of the lies William Wibert had told about him at court. Having pleaded with Gerald for a position in his entourage and having accompanied him on three diplomatic missions to Wales, Wibert proceeded to advance himself further by denouncing Gerald. Wibert told the great men at court that Gerald had taken the opportunity of his embassies to Wales to betray English interests and conspire with his native Welsh kinsmen: “And so he asserted that because the Welsh had besieged a castle, it had been invested by my contrivance, and

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514 In this letter Gerald complains that Wibert ruined his reputation and ended his ability to serve the court; therefore, it had to have been written after 1194. Gerald claimed that he and Wibert had been reconciled two years before Wibert was deposed from his abbacy. The *Waverly Annal* dates Wibert’s removal from office to 1198, so the reconciliation had to have happened c. 1196. Therefore this letter attacking Wibert was written between c. 1194-1196. *Annales Monasterii de Waverleia*, in *Annales Monastici* vol. II, ed. Henry Richards Luard *Rolls Series 36* (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, and Green, 1865), ca. 1198, p. 251.
should anything bad happen on the March, it had been brought forth by my
instigation.”515 Gerald claimed that Wibert’s lies had destroyed his own reputation at
court and that “the formerly serene faces of the curia now turned hazy and cloudy to me”
because of “the evil speaking tongue” of Wibert.516 In the esoteric reading of the
Wechelen story, Gerald designed the anchorite to be a mirror of himself, emphasizing his
identification with the native Welsh. Just as Wibert slandered Gerald before the
magnates of England, Wibert’s textual stand-in, the “woman disguised as a nun” –
attacks the reputation of Wechelen among the Welsh. It is interesting to note that the
siege of a castle was integral to both slanders.

Why a “woman in the likeness of a nun?” Gerald’s inversion of Wibert’s gender
in the Wechelen story was a jab at his enemy’s sexual insatiability. Part of Gerald’s
rhetorical strategy in his letter to the abbot of Cîteaux was to argue that William Wibert
was everything a monk should not be. According to Gerald, Wibert was a gyrovaque
who violated his vow of stability.517 He was greedy even though a monk ought to

515 “Castellum itaque quod Walenses obsederant, mea obsessum asservuit machinatione; et
quicquid mali in Marchia acciderat, me fuisse instigante protractum.” Giraldi
Cambrensis Opera I, p. 205.

516 “Sic itaque serenos antea curiae vultus, in nubes et mebulas iam mihi conversos…”
Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I, p. 205.

517 “…refusing to stay in the cloister innocently among the brethren to lament the
misdeed he transferred and carried over to gyrovaquery and dashing around and to
thrusting himself upon worldly concerns and the courts, bearing not the spirit of a monk
but only the habit, with no little scandal and disgrace to his own order.” Giraldi
Cambrensis Opera I, p. 207.
embrace individual poverty.\textsuperscript{518} Most scandalously of all, Wibert flouted his vow of chastity and his sexual incontinence was a public scandal. Gerald made much of William Wibert’s grotesque incontinence in this letter, and the misogynistic moral discourse of twelfth-century clerics gendered this particular character flaw feminine.

Gerald argued that Wibert’s perversity was indeed polymorphous. While still cellarer of Biddlesden, Wibert was “discovered with a certain widow at night;” after being dragged from her house, he had to pay to cover the matter up.\textsuperscript{519} Wibert did not limit his fornicating to widows. When he went to London on business, he stayed alone at the house of a “most wanton woman;” indeed this woman was “sustained in filthy commerce” by Wibert’s money.\textsuperscript{520} In addition to being a fornicator and a whoremonger, Wibert was an adulterer who plied the wife of his absent lord. In making this most serious charge, Gerald named names: “[Wibert] haunted a woman living near his own house, the wife of Robert de Chenneduit, a military man then serving with count John in Ireland… with the result that William de Chenneduit is called “of William Wibert” by the public throughout the entire province.”\textsuperscript{521}

Gerald claimed that Wibert’s attentions were not limited to adult women. On one


\textsuperscript{519} “cum vidua quadam nocte inventus” \textit{Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I} p. 207.

\textsuperscript{520} “huius pecunia turpi commercio sustentata” \textit{Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I}, p. 208.

\textsuperscript{521} “… uxorem Roberti de Chenneduit vicinam domui suae, viro cum comite Johanne in Hybernia tunc militante… frequentavit, quod de Willielmo Wiberto, Willielmus de Chenneduit per totam publice provinciam sit vocitatus…” \textit{Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I}, pp. 207-208.
of their embassies to Wales, Wibert caused a public scandal with a boy:

…having brought with him a certain young cleric under the pretext of kinship, and actually to the peak of his own shame… at the court of the Countess of Brecon, … he entered by night into the farthest room for the purposes of wicked uses, or rather abuses, and violated him… in an uproar he swiftly – just barely escaped from him to the inner court… raising an outcry, he accused that monk nay more, monasticism in that whole order, severely and our pen shudders to tell of it. Also at the court of prince Rhys he enticed certain boys to wickedness by the offer of money - in Wales (it certainly has to be said with great admiration), this is much loathed. Indeed, until now this damned crime was unheard of within the boundaries of Wales…

Indeed, Gerald claimed that children in general were the object of Wibert’s corrupt attentions:

However, this wild beast of ours … is accustomed always to carry ten or fifteen gold coins in a lower purse, which he habitually shows and displays to boys or girls – whenever he, as it were, notices them with his eyes, putting them in their palm or tossing them down with a certain kind of base solicitation, saying, “I can give you such things, if I want.”

In the sexual discourse of the early twenty-first century, sexual insatiability is widely stereotyped as a masculine trait while same-sex attraction, either among men or of

522 “…clericum quondam juvenculum, sub obtentu cognationis secum… deductum, ad cumulum quoque confusionis suae in comitatus dominae de Brechena… in camera ulteriori ad usus enormes vel potius abusus nocte invasit… Qui cum ab ipso cum clamore ad aulam vix cursim evasit… et monachum illum graviter immo monasticum in illo ordinem totum, proclamando diffamavit, et hoc quoque noster explicare stylus abhorruit. Qualiter etiam in curia principis Resi pueros quosdam munere ad turpitudinem invitat, Wallia quidem testificando cum admiratione perplurima detestatur. Inauditum etenim in Wallia finibus facinus istud hactenus extiterat…” Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I, p. 209.

523 “Solet autem haec bellua nostra… aureos x. aut xv. inferiores semper portare crumena, quos pueris sive puellis, sicut oculis ipse quandoque conspexit, in palma positos et excussos, pravo quodam procandi genere ostendere solet et ostentare, dicens: “Talia dare possem, si vellem.” Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I, pp. 208-209.
men for boys, is popularly gendered feminine. For this reason, modern readers might be tempted to interpret Gerald’s gender inversion of Wibert in the Wechelen story as an insulting commentary on the monk’s sexual congress with boys. Such an interpretation would be anachronistic in its narrowness. In Letter I of the *Symbolum Electorum*, Gerald depicted Wibert as a fornicator, adulterer, whoremonger, and pederast while implying that he engaged in sexual contact with children; these accusations must be interpreted together, not separately. In the twelfth century, Gerald’s depiction of Wibert’s sexual practices would not have been understood as “homosexual,” or “bisexual” – categories which did not exist in the modern sense- but as examples of sexual incontinence. Such incontinence, regardless of its object, was gendered feminine. Furthermore, such incontinence, even sexual insatiability, was not the only stereotypically feminine trait that Gerald ascribed to Wibert. He also wrote that Wibert had an “innate levity of mind,” and suffered from “a spirit of greediness and a defect of garrulosity.” In the misogynistic discourse of the twelfth-century clergy, levity, greed, and chattiness, like sexual incontinence, were all gendered feminine.

Long-standing biological and theological traditions had culminated in this antifeminist stereotype. Under the influence of the church fathers, particularly Ambrose and Jerome, the medieval clergy maintained a “…dualistic understanding of male and female sexuality, which evaluated men as governed by reason and closer to the spiritual

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realm than women, who were more lustful and mired in the material world.\textsuperscript{525} Men and women were “perceived in terms of binary oppositions and hierarchies. Women, tied to the material world and nature, were more subject to their bodies and to lust.” The opinions of the medical authorities that medieval intellectuals inherited from the ancient world helped undergird this theological view. According to Vern Bullough, classical “…anatomical and physiological theories were incorporated into Christian doctrine, where they had even greater influence on the medieval belief system than they would have if they simply had been confined to medicine. One of the basic assumptions of the classical writings on anatomy and physiology was that the male was not only different from the female, but superior to her.”\textsuperscript{526} According to Joan Cadden, medieval medical opinion associated femininity with “slowness, a limited capacity for work, and with vices, such as envy and deceitfulness…”\textsuperscript{527} Summarizing the gender distinctions she found in a “predominately Aristotelian” medieval compendium of natural history, Cadden wrote:

\begin{quote}
…males are larger than females (except among bears and leopards) but … females are easier to train, shed tears more easily, are more pious, and are more given to envy and lying. A series of chapters on physiognomy characterizes the masculine soul as active, not easily subdued when roused to anger, generous,
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{527} Joan Cadden, \textit{Meanings of Sex Differences in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science, and Culture} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 205.
studious, and controlled by virtue. The same work describes the feminine man in such feminine terms as tender-hearted, envious, easily giving in to passions, intolerant of physical work, bitter, deceitful, and timid.  

Pleasure was similarly linked to the feminine. In his *Metalogicon*, John of Salisbury (c. 1120-1180) wrote extensively about the feminizing menace of pleasure. William Burgwinkle conducted a close textual study of John’s writings about pleasure. According to Burgwinkle, John programmatically linked pleasure to effeminacy: “All arousal… leads logically to a loss of virility and beneath that veil lies the infinite expanse of the feminine, defined only in the negative: that which is not virile, strong, resistant to pleasure, controlled, contained, or governable.” Of the pleasures of courtiers, John wrote: “...devotion to feasting, drinking, banquets, song and dance, sport, over-refinements of luxury, debauchery, and varied types of defilement, weakens even robust souls and, by a sort of irony on nature’s part, renders men softer and more corrupt than women.” According to Burgwinkle, John loathed both hunting and polyphony for the same reasons; he thought that “Like hunting, music [was] essentially about pleasure; pleasure is instantly equated with sex; and sexual desire is, by rote definition, feminine.”

528 Cadden, p. 204.
530 Burgwinkle, p. 73.
531 Burgwinkle, p. 67.
532 Burgwinkle, p. 68.
John of Salisbury was a philosopher and a theologian, but he also served as a clerk at the court of Henry II. The pleasures that he denigrated as effeminate – hunting, music, and theatre – were particular pleasures of the court. His attack on the effeminacy of courtly life shares in a discursive tradition dating back to the turn of the twelfth century. In a famous diatribe against the mores and manners of the court of William Rufus, the monk and chronicler Orderic Vitalis (1075-c. 1142) wrote:

At that time effeminates set the fashion in many parts of the world: foul catamites, doomed to eternal fire, unrestrainedly pursued their revels and shamelessly gave themselves up to the filth of sodomy. They rejected the traditions of honest men, ridiculed the counsel of priests, and persisted in their barbarous way of life and style of dress. They parted their hair from the crown of the head to the forehead, grew long and luxurious locks like women, and loved to deck themselves in long over-tight shirts and tunics. Some of them frivoled away their time, spending it as they chose without regard for the law of God or the customs of their ancestors. They devoted their nights to feasts and drinking-bouts, idle chatter, dice, games of chance, and other sports, and they slept all day… Our wanton youth is sunk in effeminacy, and courtiers, fawning, seek the favours of women with every kind of lewdness.  

In the History of the Kings of England, another black monk, William of Malmesbury (c. 1080-c.1143), echoed Orderic’s disgust with courtly fashion: “Then arose the fashions of long, flowing hair, luxurious clothes, [and] shoes with curved tips. To compete with women for softness of body, to break stride with a cultivated negligence of gait, and to walk with the hips thrust forward: this was the epitome of style for youth.”

William again reproved courtly mores in the Historia Novella: “Now the men of the court are all

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eager to make women of themselves in their ways of dress." In his *Gesta Danorum*, the Danish cleric Saxo Grammaticus (c. 1150-1220) expressed a hatred bordering on the pathological for the “effeminata lascivia” at the Danish Court. He blamed the Saxons for importing these corrupt and corrupting manners into the Danish kingdom. The hero of the *Gesta Danorum* is the warrior Starcatherus, who dresses in rags, refuses gifts, and insists on eating rancid meat at the table of his king, Ingellus. During a visit to the king’s court, the grizzled warrior sings a song “chiding Ingellus for his effeminacy;” the song so humiliates Ingellus that he “takes up his sword and on the spot slays all his Saxon guests.”

Note that in all of these instances, it is the addiction to pleasure, especially sexual pleasure, which distinguishes the effeminacy of the courtier. While Orderic reproved the dandies of the court of William Rufus for “sodomy” and referred to them as “catamites,” (a term derived from Zeus’s cup-bearer Ganymede and applicable to the passive partner in a homosexual relationship), he also rebuked these same courtiers for fawning over women. In the past, some historians have identified William Rufus and his courtiers as “homosexual.” However, an understanding of the discursive tradition that gendered

535 Jaeger, p. 181.
536 Jaeger, 186.
537 Jaeger, 187.
pleasure feminine and then labeled courtiers effeminate, combined with Orderic’s observation that these same courtiers sought the favor of women, has prompted many historians of sexuality and gender to interpret Orderic’s remarks as yet more evidence that sodomy was a broad and ill-defined category not easily transferable to the more narrow modern concept “homosexuality.”

Ruth Mazo Carras, commenting on the above passage from Orderic Vitalis, wrote: “Effeminacy did not necessarily mean that the men did not have sex with women.”

If, in the Wechelen story, Gerald inverted Wibert’s gender as a comment on his sexual incontinence, and perhaps on his abandonment of the monastery for the court, why did he not simply make him a “nun” instead of a “woman disguised as a nun?” Again, the answer is found in the very letter to which Gerald referred readers of the De Rebus, Letter I of the Symbolum Electorum. Part of the rhetorical strategy Gerald adopted in his denunciation of Wibert to the abbot of Cîteaux was to profess his admiration for the Cistercians alongside his deprecation of one particular monk. In so doing, Gerald sought to separate the bad monk, William Wibert, from his otherwise good order and in so doing avoid alienating the readers he sought to persuade. To that end, Gerald claimed that he had been warned about William Wibert by Walter, the Cistercian abbot of Neath, but had


foolishly ignored the warning. Gerald tacitly approved Cistercian discipline by pointing out that before Wibert arrived at court, he had been justly removed from the office of cellarer at Biddlesden by two visiting Cistercian abbots, the same Walter and Conan, the abbot of Margam. Likewise, he absolved the Cistercian Order of responsibility for Wibert’s promotion to the abbacy of Biddlesden, writing that Wibert obtained the post by having “recourse to patronage” and using the influence of the queen. Gerald was particularly careful when denouncing Wibert’s pederasty. On the one hand, he softened the blow by writing that no one would have believed that such an act would be attempted a Cistercian. At the same time, Gerald used this particularly nasty episode to spur Wibert’s superiors into action: “in our days the Order of Cistercians on this side of the Gallic Sea has not incurred such a spot on account of one man.” To preserve his posture as a friend of the order, Gerald even claimed that he had, at one time, looked upon it as “a safe harbor from shipwreck.”

To maintain his binary of Good Cistercians/Bad Wibert, Gerald employed rhetoric implying that William Wibert only appeared to be a Cistercian monk. He cited classical proverbs such as “wicked poisons are concealed under sweet honey.”

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541 *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I*, p. 206.
542 “ad patrocinia convolante” *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I*, p. 209.
543 “…in veritate dixerim ordinem Cisterciensem, cis mare Gallicum, per hominem unum nostris diebus tantam maculam non incurisse.” *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I*, p. 209.
544 “in quo mihi finali proposio tanquam e naufragio portum elegeram” *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I*, p. 212.
545 “Impia sub dulci melle venena latent.” *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I*, p. 212.
wrote that Wibert was a wolf, who carried out his evil deeds “lurking under the form of a sheep.”

Indeed, Gerald quoted both the Gospel of Matthew and Prudentius on wolves in sheep’s clothing. He borrowed a particularly apposite quotation from Jerome: “Many who know that the language of religion is glorious hide themselves as though wolves under sheep’s skins, in order to cover filthiness of life by the dignity of a false name.”

In the Wechelen story, therefore, Gerald mirrored the rhetorical separation of Wibert from his order found in Letter I of the *Symbolum Electorum* by making the anchorite’s slanderer a “woman disguised as a nun” rather than simply calling her a nun.

Gerald had one other reason to designate Wibert’s double in the Wechelen story a woman “disguised as a nun.” In 1198, the very same year as the Painscastle disaster, the Cistercian abbots of Fountains, Rievaulx, Warden, and Waverly deposed Wibert from his abbacy. In one of his letters to Hubert Walter, Gerald referred to Wibert as “exabbatem,” but protested that he was innocent of Wibert’s disgrace because it had been over two years since he had written anything against him. Gerald even claimed that, as a result of a reconciliation he had undergone with Wibert in 1196, he had warned Wibert on the eve of his deposition that serious discipline might be coming and offered to

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546 “…lupus iste sub agno latitans” *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I*, p. 212.

547 “Multi qui sciunt religionis esse vocabulum gloriosum, se ovium pellibus quasi lupos tegunt, ut foeditatem vitae falsi nominis honore convestiant.” *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I*, p. 212.

548 “Willelmus abbas de Betlesdene depositus est…” *Annales Monasterii de Waverleia*, ca. 1198, p. 251; see also, Knowles, “Some Enemies of Gerald of Wales,” p. 199.

ameliorate his more serious charges.\textsuperscript{550} Hubert Walter was the most powerful cleric in Britain and Wibert was his creature, so this seems like a rather self-serving claim for Gerald to have made. However, even in this letter, Gerald insisted that his negative assessment of Wibert’s character had been largely accurate. In later years, Gerald did not hesitate to take full credit for Wibert’s disgrace. In Book III chapter iv of the \textit{De Rebus}, written some time between 1206 and 1213, Gerald claimed “the deposition of the said abbot [Wibert] had been brought about by the archdeacon.”\textsuperscript{551}

In two of the letters he included in the \textit{Symbolum Electorum}, Gerald described Wibert - the Wechelen story’s “woman disguised as a nun” and also “angel of Satan” - using demonic/Satanic imagery. In the letter to the abbot of Cîteaux, Gerald warned that Wibert would be a challenge to investigate, calling him “our wily shape-shifter.”\textsuperscript{552} Toward the end of the same letter, Gerald wrote that Wibert was “not a monk, but more truthfully a demoniac.”\textsuperscript{553}

Perhaps the most intriguing clue identifying the “angel of Satan” as Wibert, however, is found not in Letter I, but in Letter XXVIII of the \textit{Symbolum Electorum}.\textsuperscript{554} In Letter XXVIII, addressed to archbishop Hubert Walter, Gerald made a belligerent defense of his own conduct concerning both the archbishop and the see of St. David’s.

\textsuperscript{550} \textit{Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I}, p. 294.

\textsuperscript{551} Butler, p. 137; \textit{Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I}, p. 95.

\textsuperscript{552} “versutus noster et versipellis” \textit{Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I}, p. 211.

\textsuperscript{553} “nec monachi tamen sed verius daemoniaci” \textit{Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I}, p. 213.

\textsuperscript{554} \textit{Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I}, pp. 290-307.
Gerald attributed the archbishop’s personal animus toward him to the recent deposition of his *familiaris* William Wibert from the abbacy of Biddlesden. Hubert understood that, despite the ostensible reconciliation between Gerald and Wibert in 1196, the brutal and repeated denunciations Gerald had made of the abbot in the preceding years must have played a substantial role in Wibert’s 1198 disgrace.\(^{555}\) In Letter XXVIII, therefore, Gerald had the difficult task of claiming that he was not really responsible for Wibert’s disgrace because two years separated his denunciations from Wibert’s removal from office, while at the same time defending the essential justice of the charges he had repeatedly made against Wibert.

Gerald’s failure either to include Letter XXVIII in the *De Rebus a se Gestis* or even to refer the reader of the *De Rebus* to it offers a clue to its importance to the Wechelen story. H.E. Butler expressed some puzzlement as to why Gerald did not transcribe Letter XXVIII of the *Symbolum Electorum* into the *De Rebus a se Gestis*.\(^{556}\) After all, Gerald did transcribe into the *De Rebus* several of the letters he had exchanged with Hubert Walter at the dawn of the St. David’s controversy (late 1198 and 1199). Letter XXV of the *Symbolum Electorum*, in which Gerald protested the public denunciation Hubert had made of him on the Welsh march in late summer of 1198, was

\(^{555}\) In his response to Gerald’s first letter (Letter XXV), Hubert Walter wrote: “And as for your protest that you have harmed no man nor deserved at all that you should be hurt by any other nor suffer upbraiding I answer that you know whether you have done that which you say you have not done.” Butler, p. 137; *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I*, p. 102.

\(^{556}\) Butler, p. 146.
transcribed into Book III, chapter v of the *De Rebus*.\(^557\) Hubert’s reply to this protest is preserved as Letter XXVII of the *Symbolum Electorum* and also appears in Book III chapter vi of the *De Rebus*.\(^558\) Letter XXVI of the *Symbolum Electorum*, in which Gerald set forth to Hubert Walter what he believed to be essential qualities for the next bishop of St. David’s, was transcribed into the *De Rebus* in Book III chapter vii.\(^559\) Letter XXVIII of the *Symbolum Electorum* was clearly a part of this series; it was composed during the same period and concerned many of the same matters. And yet, despite the fact that Gerald thought well enough of the letter to include it in the *Symbolum Electorum*, he did not transcribe Letter XXVIII into the *De Rebus a se Gestis*.

I believe there are two reasons Gerald kept Letter XXVIII of the *Symbolum Electorum* out of the *De Rebus a se Gestis*. First, in Letter XXVIII Gerald did not blacken Hubert Walter’s role in the Painscastle episode to the extent that he would months later, in his January 1200 address before the pope.\(^560\) Because that address was the rhetorical apogee of the *De Rebus*, Gerald did not include any material that would mitigate his relentlessly negative depiction of the archbishop.

Secondly, including Letter XXVIII of the *Symbolum Electorum* in a chapter of the *De Rebus a se Gestis* would have made identifying Wibert with the “woman in the

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\(^{557}\) *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I*, pp. 96-101; 289.

\(^{558}\) *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I*, pp. 101-102; 290.

\(^{559}\) *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I*, pp. 102-105; 289-90.

\(^{560}\) When Gerald wrote Letter XXVIII, sometime in 1199, his relation to Hubert had not yet turned entirely antagonistic; indeed, in this letter Gerald suggested that Hubert had been praying before the battle that conflict could be avoided.
likeness of a nun” too easy and thereby compromised the successful concealment of the esoteric layer of the Wechelen story. While Gerald did refer the reader of the *De Rebus a se Gestis* to the first letter in the *Symbolum Electorum* denouncing Wibert, he did not copy Letter I into the text of the *De Rebus*. Having been referred to the *Symbolum Electorum*, the interested reader would also have found Letter XXVIII. In this letter, Gerald once again depicted Wibert as a malicious slanderer who was not a true monk. Most importantly, in warning Hubert Walter about William Wibert’s true nature, Gerald described Wibert in language that exactly parallels the Wechelen story’s “angel of Satan:”

…because evil cannot be avoided if it is not recognized, if one wishes to recognize completely the nature, mores, and manners of this beast [William Wibert], he ought to ask for the letter sent to the lord abbot of the Cistercians, wherein he will be able to assess and distinguish clearly how much distance lay between the habit and the deed, how much between the cowlèd one’s outward display and [what is] carried within. *How angels of Satan transform themselves into angels of light.*

Indirect evidence from the *Speculum Ecclesiae* supports my contention that Letter XXVIII of the *Symbolum Electorum* was deliberately excluded from the *De Rebus a se Gestis* on account of its too-easy identification of William Wibert with the “angel of Satan.” The *Speculum Ecclesiae* was written toward the end of Gerald’s life, just before the fourth Lateran Council of 1215. Gerald dedicated one chapter of the work, which was largely devoted to various outrages committed by monks in Wales and elsewhere, to

561 “Si quis autem, quia malum vitari non potest nisi cognitum, belluae istius naturam, mores et modos plenius agnoscere voluerit, epistolam olim domino abbati Cisterciensi missam requirat; inter habitum distet et actum, qualiter quod exterius cucullati præferunt intus non perferunt. Qualiter angeli Sathanæ in angelos lucis sese transformant.” *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I*, pp. 300-301.
his old grudge against William Wibert. After repeating many, though not all of the charges he made against Wibert in his earlier letters, Gerald referred the interested reader not only to Letter I, but also to Letter XXVIII of the *Symbolum Electorum*.

The “Devil”

If the “angel of Satan” in the esoteric layer of the Wechelen story is William Wibert, “the Devil” must surely be Wibert’s patron, Hubert Walter, archbishop of Canterbury. This is unsurprising. Archbishop Hubert Walter, who opposed both Gerald’s election and the metropolitan pretensions of St. David’s, was also the arch villain of the missing chapters of the *De Rebus a se Gestis*. Hubert Walter probably also harbored personal animosity toward Gerald because of things Gerald had written about him during the early 1190’s. To understand what Gerald was up against during the St. David’s controversy, it is important to understand that from King Richard’s return from captivity until his the archbishop’s own death in 1205, Hubert Walter was the most powerful curial magnate in England. In his biography of Hubert, C. R. Cheney wrote:

The Angevin king left England to Hubert Walter. Until July 1198, when Hubert

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562 *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera IV*, pp. 156-161.

563 *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera IV*, p. 161.

564 This is confirmed both by the chapter headings of the *De Rebus a se Gestis*, which have survived even for the lost chapters, and by the considerable material the *De Rebus* shares in common with the other St. David’s works, the *De Invectionibus* and the *De Iure et Statu Menevensis Ecclesie*. *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I*, pp. 3-18; See also, Bartlett, p. 219; *Spec. Duo.*, xx-xxi.

565 Please see Chapter One, pp. 87-9.
resigned from the office of justiciar, he was virtually regent, directing military operations, planning the civil government. True, the justiciar could not count on being left entirely to himself. His inconsiderate master would sometimes complicate affairs by personal interference, as in the business of the king’s half-brother, Archbishop Geoffrey of York. But in general, the whole burden of English government fell on the justiciar. To describe his work would be to write again the political and administrative and legal history of England from 1194 to 1198. And, during all this time, the responsibilities of the justiciar had to be balanced against those of the archbishop of Canterbury who, from March 1195 onwards, was also papal legate throughout England.\footnote{Cheney, \textit{Hubert Walter} (London: Nelson, 1967), pp. 90-91.}

There are two principle proofs that the “Devil” of the Wechelen story was Hubert Walter. The first is Gerald’s repeated linking of Hubert Walter to William Wibert. The second is to compare the way that the anchorite of Llowes described the Painscastle incident in the Wechelen story (Book III chapter ii) to the many ways that Gerald insisted, in Book III, chapters iv, v, vi, vii and xx, that Hubert bore primary responsibility for the battle.\footnote{The only surviving copy of the \textit{De Rebus} ends at Book III chapter xix, but fortunately chapter xx of the \textit{De Rebus a se Gestis} can also be found in the \textit{De Invectionibus} Book I chapter ii, pp. 85-93.} Let us examine both.

In the surviving chapters of the \textit{De Rebus a se Gestis}, Gerald explicitly and repeatedly linked William Wibert, the Wechelen story’s “angel of Satan,” with Hubert Walter. In the Wechelen story, the anchorite claimed that in order to provoke the battle at Painscastle, the Devil “procured that such a message should come to the English as though from him whom they considered trustworthy.” That is to say, the Devil saw to it that his false counsel was carried to the English by a diabolic messenger; this messenger was the “woman disguised as a nun/angel of Satan.” Once William Wibert is unmasked
as the “angel of Satan,” one has only to review the evidence of four of the surviving chapters in Book III of the *De Rebus a se Gestis* to see how careful Gerald was to link Wibert to Hubert Walter. In fact, he made it quite clear that Wibert was the archbishop’s creature and even his messenger.

Book III chapters iv, v, vi, and vii of the *De Rebus* are given over to a correspondence Gerald undertook with Hubert Walter in late 1198 to 1199. This is the correspondence Gerald initiated because he heard that the archbishop had indulged in a public outburst against him. In each of the four chapters of the *De Rebus* treating this correspondence, Gerald explicitly linked Wibert to Archbishop Hubert.

Gerald drew the most important connection between his two enemies in Book III chapter iv. In this chapter, Gerald explained both the circumstances surrounding Hubert Walter’s public outburst against him and the cause of the archbishop’s anger. In July of 1198, less than a month before the battle at Painscastle, Peter de Leia, bishop of St. David’s, had died. After the battle, while Hubert was still present on the Welsh march, the necessity of appointing a custodian to the newly vacant see was brought to his attention. Someone suggested Gerald, and this sent the archbishop into a rage:

... for the Archbishop received the news of the Bishop’s death, while as Justiciar he was in the March of Wales with the English army that he sent against the Welsh when there was that great slaughter at Pains Castle: and when he inquired who there was who could take custody of the Church and Bishopric during the vacancy, and those who had been sent to him replied that there was Giraldus the Archdeacon, then in the schools of Lincoln, the Archbishop forthwith uttered vile and dishonourable words against the person of the Archdeacon, saying that never, while he lived, would he entrust him either with the Bishopric or its custody. For at that time he was much offended with the Archdeacon on account of William Wibert, Abbot of Biddlesden, a monk of the Cistercian order, and a most worthless gadabout, who had a little while before been deposed by means of the
Archdeacon, whom he had grievously offended. For he [Wibert] had been a friend of the Archbishop and often put himself forward so that he might be sent as his messenger both to Wales and to Scotland, and also to gad about in divers other places.  

In this passage, Gerald identified William Wibert as an intimate of Hubert Walter’s and indeed as his messenger. If, in the esoteric reading of the Wechelen story, Wibert is not only the “woman disguised as a nun” but also the “angel of Satan” and his messenger, it is hard to imagine who but Hubert Walter could be “the Devil.”

Further suggesting that “the Devil” of the Wechelen story is, in fact, Hubert Walter is way that Gerald, in the De Rebus a se Gestis, emphasized Hubert’s sole responsibility for the “slaughter” at Painscastle while consistently identifying the archbishop as “justiciar.” Thus, in the passage excerpted from chapter iv, above, Gerald wrote: “... for the Archbishop received the news of the Bishop’s death, while as Justiciar he was in the March of Wales with the English army that he sent against the Welsh when there was that great slaughter at Pains Castle.”

Gerald’s claim presents two serious difficulties. Hubert Walter was not physically present at the battle of Painscastle. Furthermore, he had been replaced as the justiciar of England several weeks before the battle took place.

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568 Butler, p. 130; Erat enim offensus archidiacono tunc plurimum propter abbatem de Bedlesdene, sc. Willelmum Wibertum monachum Cisterciensis ordinis trutanissimum, per operam archidiaconi, quem graviter offenderat, paulo ante depositum. Fuerat enim archiepiscopo familiaris, et ut nuncius eius tam in Walliam quam in Scotiam fieret et ad varias partes ipso mittente discurreret, se frequenter inferebat.” Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I, pp. 95-6.

569 Butler, p. 130; “…archiepiscopus in marchia Walliae tanquam justiciarius existens, cum exercitu Angliae, quem contra Walenses in Elevain misit, ubi strages illa grandis apud Castellum, Pagani facta fuit…” Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I, p. 95.
Gerald knew – and acknowledged – that Hubert Walter was not physically present at the battle of Painscastle. In his first oration before the pope in the St. David’s case, for example, Gerald freely acknowledged that Hubert had not been present at the battle, while nonetheless insisting that the slaughter which took place there was the archbishop’s responsibility. 570 According to Gerald, it had been Hubert Walter who had raised the English army: “the Archbishop, that he might display his great power and courage, straightway mustered the English forces.” 571 Gerald assigned further responsibility to the archbishop by claiming that Hubert had “ordered his men to give battle.” However, in describing how the archbishop learned of the English victory the next day he admitted Hubert had not been on the field of battle: “Moreover, on the morrow when he received the news of that great slaughter, forthwith through all the fortress of Bridgnorth, where he then was, he ordered the bells to be publicly rung…” 572 While the archbishop mustered the English army that defeated the Welsh at Painscastle, and while he accompanied that army to the march, Hubert Walter had apparently withdrawn to a fortress at Bridgnorth about fifty miles north of Hay sometime before the battle began. It is for this reason that “the Devil” in the Wechelen story required an “angel of Satan” to carry his message to the English army at Hay.

570 Gerald’s first oration before the pope in the St. David’s case was included in the intact De Rebus a se Gesti as Book III chapter xx – this is the first missing chapter of the only surviving copy of the De Rebus. The oration survives because Gerald also included it in the De Invectionibus.

571 Butler, p. 181; De Invect., p. 92.

572 Butler, p. 181; De Invect., p. 92. In Letter XXVIII of the Symbolum Electorum, Gerald also acknowledged explicitly Hubert’s absence from the battle. Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I, p. 294.
Nowhere does Gerald admit that the commander of the English army on the day of the battle was actually Geoffrey fitz Peter. Nor does he admit that Geoffrey had replaced Hubert Walter in the office of justiciar of England a few weeks before the battle outside Painscastle. That the change in justiciar had taken place just before the battle is reflected in the divergent accounts of Painscastle written by two contemporary English chroniclers: Gervase of Canterbury credited Hubert Walter with the victory, while Roger of Hoveden credited the new justiciar, Geoffrey. The confusion of contemporary chroniclers is certainly understandable. It is important to remember, however, that Gerald did not compose the De Rebus a se Gestis until at least a decade later, c. 1208-1216. By then, Gerald – a former courtier well-informed about politics - must have known that Geoffrey, with whom he was friendly, had been both justiciar and military commander on the day of the battle. I do not believe Gerald was simply mistaken; he had both a moral and a political reason for continuing to insist, long after the fact, that Hubert had been justiciar on the day the Welsh uprising was crushed.

In the moral sense, even if Hubert had recently set aside the office of justiciar he could certainly be charged with responsibility for Painscastle. Save for the king himself, archbishop Hubert Walter, in one capacity or another, was the most powerful man in England from 1193 until his death. He bore a good deal of moral responsibility for the actions of that regime. Furthermore, during his years as justiciar, 1193-1198, Hubert did


not allow his clerical status to keep him from the battlefield. He led the siege of John’s supporters at Marlborough castle in 1194; he supervised personally the undermining of Welshpool castle in Wales in September of 1196.\textsuperscript{575} Indeed, C.R. Cheney wrote that, for contemporaries, “Even if Archbishop Hubert was scrupulous not to bear arms in defiance of the canons, his generalship was a reproach against him.”\textsuperscript{576} Hubert’s power as an administrator was even more central to his authority than his occasional military expeditions, and indeed his removal from the office of justiciar did little to diminish his power and importance. The \textit{Histoire Guillaume le Mareschal} depicted the great earl and the archbishop as kingmakers in the days following Richard’s premature death in 1199.\textsuperscript{577} On the same day that archbishop Hubert Walter presided over John’s coronation, the new king made Hubert his chancellor. Until his death in 1205, Hubert remained the most powerful curial magnate in England. In this sense, Gerald was correct, if not accurate; whether or not Hubert held the office of justiciar, he certainly wielded the power.

Gerald also had political/rhetorical reasons for insisting that Hubert was still justiciar on the day of the battle. Throughout twelfth century, there was considerable controversy over ecclesiastical prelates’ holding secular offices.\textsuperscript{578} According to Charles

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\item \textsuperscript{575} Charles R. Young, \textit{Hubert Walter, Lord of Canterbury and Lord of England} (Durham: Duke University Press, 1968), p. 120.
\item \textsuperscript{576} Cheney, p. 99.
\item \textsuperscript{578} In a later address before Pope Innocent, Gerald sneered at Hubert Walter’s service to the exchequer. \textit{De Invect.}, p. 97. For the controversy over clerics serving the court, see John W. Baldwin, \textit{Masters, Princes, and Merchants: The Social Views of Peter the }
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R. Young:

…canon law, reiterated …[in] 1175… prohibited clerks in holy orders from becoming involved in court sentences prescribing death or mutilation. Another principle of canon law, that clerks should avoid positions that made them answerable to laymen, was reinforced in 1179 by the twelfth canon of the third Lateran Council, which provided for the deposition of clergy who undertook secular jurisdiction under princes or laymen.579

To serve as justiciar, Archbishop Hubert Walter was required to make judgments of blood and he was certainly answerable to King Richard, a layman.

Indeed there was, and is, some controversy over whether Hubert’s resignation from the office of justiciar in the weeks before Painscastle was voluntary, or whether the pope had pressured Richard into relieving the archbishop of his secular office. The chronicler Roger of Hoveden believed that the Canterbury monks, Hubert Walter’s adversaries in the unending wrangle between archbishop and monastery, had complained to the pope about bloody measures the archbishop had employed to suppress the London uprising of William “Longbeard” fitz Osbert.580 In spring of 1196, Longbeard, who had long agitated on behalf of the poorer Londoners, responded to Hubert Walter’s summons

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579 Young, Hubert Walter, pp. 47-48.

with a throng of supporters. Men of London were deputed to arrest William, but in the
affray that followed William stabbed one of these men; he and his followers fled to the
church of St. Mary-le-Bow and fortified it against the authorities. The church was set
alight, and when William and his band attempted to flee the conflagration, he was
stabbed. The wounded rabble-rouser and nine followers were afterwards condemned at
the Tower and hanged.

Did the pope, having heard of this incident, command King Richard to relieve
Hubert of the office of justiciar? Hubert Walter’s modern biographers disagree. C.R.
Cheney accepted Roger of Hoveden’s version of Hubert’s resignation, writing that it was
likely that Hubert Walter was “in a bad odour at Rome in 1198.” Charles R. Young
took the opposite view, arguing that Roger is the only contemporary source suggesting
that Richard had relieved Hubert of his curial office under pressure from the pope, and
that Roger’s sources were hostile to Hubert Walter. Regardless of whether the pope
had actually pressured Richard into removing the archbishop from the justiciarship, the
charge that the pope was offended at Hubert’s combining secular and ecclesiastical
authority was in the air and Gerald, a courtier of ten years’ experience, would know to
press his advantage. He did so in his January 1200 oration before Pope Innocent III.

581 Chronica Magistri Rogeri de Houedene IV, pp. 47-8.
582 Cheney, p. 100.
583 Young, pp. 129-130.
584 Gerald made explicit reference to this in a later speech before the cardinals. He said,
of Hubert, “A year ago he was justiciar, and when that office was taken from him by the
Court of Rome, he managed at once to get himself appointed the King’s Chancellor.”
It is necessary to set the scene for this first of Gerald’s speeches before Pope and consistory. Because the chapter of St. David’s had appealed to the pope against the interference of the archbishop of Canterbury in the matter of Gerald’s election, it was necessary that the canons send someone to argue the case in Rome.\textsuperscript{585} Not only was Gerald the best-educated man in the chapter (and probably in all of Wales), he was certainly motivated to defend his own election. Gerald “took the case,” while at the same time taking the opportunity of his own appeal to pursue the archiepiscopal claims of St. David’s against the metropolitan authority of Canterbury.

Gerald had arrived in Rome to press his appeal in late November of 1199. Fifteen days before Christmas, a letter arrived at Rome from Archbishop Hubert Walter which not only attacked Gerald’s character and the legality of his election, but also pleaded the necessity of Canterbury’s metropolitan oversight of the Welsh. Gerald transcribed Hubert’s letter into Book III chapter xix of the \textit{De Rebus a se Gestis}. In the only extant manuscript of the \textit{De Rebus}, Book III chapter xix is the last surviving chapter. Because a complete list of chapter headings for the \textit{De Rebus} survives, we know that the first missing chapter contained Gerald’s reply to Hubert Walter’s attack.\textsuperscript{586} Fortunately, this particular speech, the most principled and impassioned that Gerald made before the pope, survives in its entirety in the \textit{De Invectionibus}. The fact that Gerald’s furious response to

\textsuperscript{585} Butler, pp. 156-160; \textit{Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I}, pp. 112-115.

\textsuperscript{586} \textit{Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I} pp. 6; 120-122. Please see Introduction, pp. ___
the archbishop’s letter of invective is the first chapter missing from the only extant copy of the De Rebus a se Gestis is an historical accident. This historical accident must not obscure the fact that Gerald’s oration in response to Hubert Walter’s defamatory letter served as the rhetorical apogee of the intact De Rebus a se Gestis.

Hubert Walter’s letter of invective both impugned the legality of Gerald’s election and attacked his character. Most of these charges were ad hominem in nature. According to Hubert, Gerald had “relied on his descent and not upon his character” when he sought the see of St. David’s. Furthermore, Gerald’s election was not lawful; it relied upon both threats and the unlawful use of the chapter’s seal. Hubert claimed that Gerald had hoped to presume upon the pope’s ignorance of matters in a remote corner of Wales and this presumption had spurred an over-hasty appeal to Rome. Having besmirched Gerald’s character and denounced as fraudulent his election, Hubert concluded by affirming the political importance of Canterbury’s supremacy over all the sees of Wales:

For the Welsh being sprung by unbroken succession from the original stock of the

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587 The heading for the chapter following the Archbishop’s attack on Gerald reads, “De archidiaconi responsione.” Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I, p. 6.

588 Gerald made several further arguments before the pope, and these have also been preserved. However, as the St. David’s case ground on, Gerald’s addresses before the consistory took on an increasingly procedural and particular character. In the first oration Gerald made before the pope in January of 1200, he responded to Hubert Walter’s arguments in large measure by invoking principled, rather than procedural, arguments.

589 Butler, p. 167; De Invect., 83.

590 Butler, p. 168; De Invect., pp. 83-84.

591 Butler, p. 168; De Invect., p. 84.
While Gerald’s response to Hubert’s letter was, in one sense, based upon legal argumentation, it was also every bit as bitter and _ad hominem_ as had been the archbishop’s attack on him; it began, “Holy Father, it is in the nature of dogs to bark when they cannot bite…” In the oration that followed, Gerald made four arguments. First, Gerald defended the legitimacy of his election and denied that he had used intimidation or abused the chapter’s seal. Second, Gerald defended his own character against the more personal aspects of Hubert’s charges, particularly the charges of dishonesty and personal ambition. Third, Gerald returned fire against Hubert Walter with a blistering personal attack depicting the archbishop as a man of blood who owed his position to a layman and who uncanonically wielded both the secular and spiritual swords. Finally, Gerald turned on its head the archbishop’s claim that the Welsh required the metropolitan oversight of Canterbury, arguing that Canterbury used the spiritual sword to oppress the Welsh. These last two arguments in particular confirm that “the Devil” of the Wechelen story was, in fact, Hubert Walter.

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592 Butler, p. 169; “Walenses enim a prima Britonum prosapia continua sanguinis successione deduci, tocius Britannie dominum sibi de iure deberi iactitant. Unde si non effere gentis et effrene barbariem distictionis ecclesiastice censura coercuisset, facta per Cantuariensem, cui gens illa lege provinciali habitu in censura fuerit, a rege suo vel continua vel crebra rebellione discississet, sequente necessario tocius Anglicane regionis inquietudine.” _De Invect._, pp. 84-85.

593 Butler, p. 170; “Pater Sancte, canum ut nostis proprietas et proteruitas est, quod ubi mordere non possunt, latrire non cessant.” _De Invect._, p. 85.
Gerald responded to the archbishop’s claim that he was personally ambitious by returning the charge. He argued that Hubert Walter had obtained his offices “…by the power, not to say the violence of princes, to whom he has cloven, after the fashion of the world, rather than by any merit of his own…” Gerald contrasted the archbishop’s personal ambition with his own lack of the same, slyly alluding to the fact that King Richard had promoted Hubert because, as bishop of Salisbury, he had been so instrumental in raising the king’s ransom: “…unless King Richard had been detained in Germany and imprisoned there in many places, he would without a doubt have made very different provision for the Church of England.”

Having attributed his enemy’s position entirely to the power of a lay prince, Gerald then argued that the archbishop was responsible for judgments of blood. Because Hubert, in his letter of invective, had suggested that Gerald engaged in forgery in order to document his election to the see of St. David’s, Gerald returned the charge with interest: “I would that he was as little liable to charges of incendiarism and homicide (witness the fate of Longbeard of London!) as I am to forgery.” By invoking the torching of the church in which Longbeard had taken refuge, and by attributing Longbeard’s execution to the justiciar/archbishop, Gerald shrewdly capitalized on the rumored displeasure of the

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594 Butler, p. 178; “qui principum quibus seculariter adhesit potentia magis, ne dicam violentia, quam meritorum exigentia…” De Invect., p. 90.

595 Butler, p. 174; De Invect., p. 87.

596 Butler, p. 176; “Sed utinam tam immunis ipse ab omni crimen, precipe vero a crimen incendiarii et homicidii, teste Barbato Londoniens, sicut et ego a crimen falsarii.” De Invect., p. 89.
Holy See with the secular and uncanonical nature of Hubert’s service to the king.

The rhetorical apogee of Gerald’s first oration before the pope – and arguably of the entire intact De Rebus a se Gestis – was Gerald’s indignant response to the archbishop’s argument that the metropolitan authority of Canterbury was necessary to check the aggression of the Welsh. To refute this argument, he invoked the three thousand Welsh dead at Painscastle – and in so doing, Gerald made the Painscastle disaster the epitome of Hubert Walter’s unnatural combination of the secular and ecclesiastical swords in his own person. Gerald opened with a principled argument:

[Hubert Walter] tries to fortify his case by dragging in the King as his ally, saying that, had not the Church of Wales been made subject by provincial law to the Church of England, “that people would either by continual or at least by frequent rebellion have broken from their allegiance to the King.” But in this he seems, saving his authority, to have written with a certain lack of circumspection, as if the King of England with all his great forces could not subdue that little nation by the power of his material sword, without borrowing the spiritual sword to aid him. Hence it is, my Lord, that the princes of Wales make common cause in complaining to your Holiness that, as often as they meet their enemy in the field of battle to defend their country and its freedom, all who fall on their side, fall excommunicate, by the sentence of Canterbury, which is arbitrarily imposed in defiance both of common prudence and all ordinance of law… what, I say, could be more unjust than that such a race, merely because they defend their bodies, lands and liberties against a hostile nation, repelling force with force, should forthwith be sundered from the body of Christ and delivered over unto Satan? It is an injustice unheard of till now.597

597 Butler, 179-180. “Ad hec etiam finalem denique malleum apponens, totumque negotium quasi sub securi quadam et securitate concludens, causam suam sub regis societate munire molitur, dicens quod nisi ecclesia Wallie Anglicane ecclesie iure provinciali subiecta fuisset, gens illa ab Anglorum rege discedens continuo vel crebro rebellaret.” Sed minus circumspecte, salua auctoritate sua, in hac parte scripsisse videtur, tanquam non possit rex Anglie totis et tantis viribus suis gentem illam modicam gladio suo domare materiali, nisi et spirituale sibi in subsidium mutuetur. Hinc, domine, vestre sanctitati litteris suis communiter principes Wallie conqueruntur, quod quociens in bellico conflictu contra hostilem populum ob patrie tutelam et libertatis congruuntur,
Having established the general principle, Gerald invoked the Painscastle disaster to devastating effect:

Holy Father, a thing came to pass last year, so horrible that it is not right that you and your brethren should be left in ignorance concerning it. For when that man was still Justiciar of the realm [barely a year has passed since this happened] the Welsh besieged a certain castle which the English had built, not within the boundaries of England, but rather in Wales itself, to the end that they might rob them of their lands. And when he heard this, that Archbishop, that he might display his great power and courage, straightway mustered the English forces and coming to those parts, on the very same day on which he had ordered his men to give battle to the Welsh, called together the Bishops and clergy of those parts and, with candles lit for all to behold, excommunicated every Welshmen that was arrayed against him… And it so chanced, such being the fortune of war, that about three thousand Welshmen were slain that day by the edge of the sword; nor indeed would it be cause for marvel that sign and wonders should be vouchsafed to the successor of the Blessed Thomas. Moreover, on the morrow when he received the news of that great slaughter, forthwith through all the fortress of Bridgnorth, where he then was, he ordered the bells to be publicly rung and the “Te Deum laudamus” to be chanted aloud, like a good shepherd giving thanks to God that on that one day he had sent down to Hell the souls of so many of his sheep. But whether he ought more truly to be called a good shepherd of his flock or rather a ravening wolf, I leave as a matter of further inquiry. So on that occasion he made an evil use of both the swords committed to him and to speak truth it was an evil thing that he should at that time have had both swords at once in his grasp.598

per Cantuariensis sententiam citra omnem iuris ordinem, pro animi sui motu solo minus discrete datam, quicunque ex parte ipsorum cadunt, excommunicati cadunt.” De Invect., pp. 91-92.

598 Butler, pp. 180-181; save brackets – translation mine. “Pater sancte, quiddam anno preterito contigit, quod conscientiam vestram et fratrum ob facti detestationem preterire non debet. Cum adhuc enim regni iusticiarius esset homo ille, vix anno elapso, et publicus officialis, Walenses castrum quoddam obsederant, non in finibus Anglie sed pocius in Wallia, ad terras suas eis auferendum ab Anglicis constructum. Quo audito, statim archiepiscopus iste, collectis Anglie viribus, ad potentie sue magne et animositatis ostentationem, ad partes illas accessit, et eodem die quo suis cum Walensibus congressum indexerat, convocatis ad hoc episcopis et viris partium illarum religiosis, publice candelis accensis Walenses illos omnes excommunicavit, principes quidem et magnates ex….. vel genere, et ita forte contigit sicut se habet alea belli, quod circiter tria
Gerald’s portrayal of the archbishop of Canterbury’s conduct at Painscastle – both Hubert Walter’s use of excommunication as a weapon wielded against the souls of the temporal enemies of England and his unseemly celebration following the death of three thousand men - is mirrored by the conduct of “the Devil” in the Wechelen story. According to Wechelen, “the Devil” provoked the English attack “on account of the perdition of many which he foresaw as a consequence and the great profit in souls that would come to him out of this conflict.” By excommunicating the Welsh before the battle of Painscastle, Hubert Walter had indeed “sent down to Hell” the souls of the very men over whom he claimed metropolitan authority.

So what is the esoteric message of the Wechelen story? In sum, it is this: Gerald has heard a rumor current among the Welsh that sometime in late July or early August of 1198, he had encouraged the English to attack the native Welsh force besieging Painscastle. This rumor had been started deliberately. It was set in motion by the actions of William Wibert, a deposed abbot and incontinent monk still wearing the garb of a regular cleric; this ex-abbot had told the English assembled at Hay that Gerald believed they ought to attack the Welsh without delay. Gerald had never sent any such message and knew nothing about it until after the battle; indeed, as befit his status as a cleric, he,

millia Walensium eodem die… gladii corruerunt. Nec mirum etenim si pro successore beati Thome signa divinitis et miracula fiant. In crastino vero suscepto rumore stragis illius, statim per totum castrum Brugense scilicet ubi tunc erat campanas publice pulsari fecit et “Te Deum Laudamus” alta voce cantari, tanquam bonus pastor Deo gratias referens, quod tot parochianorum Suorum animas uno die ad inferna transmiserat. Sed utrum verius tunc gregis pastor bonus an lupus rapax dicendus fuerit, in questione relinquo. Male igitur utroque gladio tunc usus est, et ut verbis autenticis utar, male tunc utrumque gladium in manu eius fuit.” *De Invect.*, p. 92.
would have endeavored to stop it if he could have. William Wibert was not Gerald’s messenger, but Hubert Walter’s. He had been dispatched to Hay from the castle at Bridgnorth where the archbishop had taken shelter on the eve of the battle. For William Wibert, the incident presented an opportunity to avenge his loss of the abbacy at Biddlesden by once again defaming Gerald. For Hubert Walter, using Gerald’s good name to prod the English army into a successful attack on the Welsh worked out beautifully. By urging the English army into battle, he had crushed a Welsh uprising; by excommunicating the Welsh soldiers before the battle began, he managed to send three thousand of his enemies to hell.

Why the Wechelen Story?

Having completed the esoteric reading of the Wechelen story, it is fair to ask why Gerald constructed this elaborate literary device. Why not simply accuse Hubert Walter and William Wibert openly of hastening the battle at Painscastle while attempting to ruin his good name? Gerald had two reasons for this – one which might be classified as “rhetorical” and the other “practical.”

Gerald’s first address before the pope, made in defense of his own election and the rights of the see of St. David’s, was the rhetorical apogee of the De Rebus a se Gesti. His invocation of the excommunicated souls of the three thousand Welshmen who died fighting for their liberties outside Painscastle was, in turn, the pinnacle of that address. To understand this is to understand one reason Gerald concocted the esoteric layer of the
The rumor the anchorite of Llowes laments in the Wechelen story - that had advised the English to attack the Welsh - was clearly a mirror of a rumor current among the Welsh that Gerald had advised the English to do so. Were Gerald to deny plainly that he had urged the English attack on the Welsh besieging Painscastle, such a denial would have compromised the essential arguments of the De Rebus – that Gerald was born to be bishop of St. David’s and that he was the champion of both the rights of the native Welsh and of their church. Any open denial of such a rumor, made anywhere in the De Rebus a se Gestis, no matter how vehemently, would have fatally undermined the rhetorical arc of the work; such a denial would have compromised the strident, even prophetic tone Gerald took when he denounced Hubert’s role in the Painscastle disaster before the Vicar of Christ. Gerald’s posture as the voice of the Welsh in Rome, the righteous accuser of an alien archbishop who had placed the power of his secular lord over the souls committed to his charge, could not withstand any association with the Painscastle disaster.

A rumor linking Gerald with the Welsh defeat at Painscastle also presented Gerald with a more practical dilemma. Were he to deny the rumor outright within the pages of the De Rebus a se Gestis, his very denial would not only spread the rumor to any reader who had not heard. it would also preserve the rumor for posterity. Gerald understood that news – and rumor - traveled fast. Elsewhere in the De Rebus a se Gestis he expressed astonishment that the story of his standoff with the bishop of Llandaff had reached the ears of Henry II before he was able to relate it to the king in person.599 And

599 Butler, p. 56-57; Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I, pp. 39-40.
yet, while a rumor as poisonous as the one linking Gerald to the Welsh defeat at
Painscastle would certainly travel quickly, such a rumor lacked the modern tools which
would make it universally known – it could not be “broadcast.” Gerald must have had
reason to suspect that a rumor linking him to Painscastle had made its way around Wales,
but he had no way of knowing how widely it had been disseminated, or whether any
particular reader of the De Rebus a se Gestis would have heard it.

Gerald’s position as archdeacon of Brecon, his service at the curial court of Henry
II, his kinship to great men in Wales and Ireland, and his crusade to obtain metropolitan
rights for St David’s, all made him a very public figure. Once a damaging rumor attaches
to such a figure, discrediting that rumor is no simple matter. Over the course of my own
experience consulting for political campaigns, I have learned that the straightforward
denial of a false rumor has a double edge. No matter how outrageous the rumor, no
matter how plausible the denial, once a charge has made its way into public discourse it
becomes impossible to eradicate it. Sometimes the damage a rumor causes can be
controlled successfully, but the rumor never goes away. Furthermore, the very denial of
a damaging rumor can both bring that rumor out of obscurity and even affirm it.

A substantial proportion of any population is composed of men and women who
are not the least bit shrewd or sophisticated but who have convinced themselves that they
are very worldly. Such sophomoric men and women can be found in every calling and
station of life. They interpret any rumor concerning a public figure with a grotesque
combination of naivety and cynicism. First the naivety: “Were the rumor untrue,” such a
person thinks, “it would not sound so convincing – surely an untrue rumor could not
really “stick” to an important person?” Because so many people share this false
presumption, groundless rumors and grotesque distortions of the truth invariably do
immense damage to the reputations of public figures.

A public figure, once he or she becomes aware of the circulation of such a rumor,
is tempted to contain the damage by straightaway issuing strenuous denials. The
sophomoric portion of the public which has already given credence to the rumor simply
because it exists will, of course, take notice of any denial issued - just not in the way the
public figure intends. Indeed, the moment the victim of a scurrilous rumor attempts to set
the record straight, the initial naivety of that most sophomoric portion of the public is
joined to an equally inapt cynicism. This combination of naivety and cynicism renders
nearly any rumor irrefutable.

Having already believed a vicious rumor about a public figure because nothing
untrue could “stick” to such an important person, this most sophomoric portion of the
public cynically assume that any public denial of the same rumor, however well founded,
has only been concocted to limit the damage. Since the rumor would not be damaging
were it not true, the rumor stands all the more vindicated by the very presentation of
evidence to the contrary. To such people, the strenuous denial of a rumor only serves to
vindicate that rumor by attesting to its strength. For this reason, a public figure is wise to
begin her handling of a scurrilous rumor by ignoring it. An unintended consequence of
denying a rumor with a limited circulation is to spread that rumor to people who have not
heard it while confirming the truth of the rumor to a certain portion of the population.
Thus the political maxim, “If you’re explaining, you’re losing.” If an early effort at
quelling a rumor by ignoring it fails (and it often does), a wise public figure must not only attack the rumor but also the messenger.

The esoteric layer of the Wechelen story constitutes a brilliant combination of all these strategies. The De Rebus avoids spreading the hostile rumor that Gerald had advised the English to attack the Welsh force besieging Painscastle by concealing his refutation of the rumor in an esoteric form intended only for a few readers. Furthermore, by making his authorial double a holy man while rendering his enemies as “the Devil” and “a woman disguised as a nun/angel of Satan” Gerald has not only set forth his refutation of the rumor, he has also attacked his two most bitter enemies. That is to say, in the course of blaming William Wibert for carrying aggressive advice to the English under false pretenses, Gerald has also reminded his esoteric readers of the sexual indiscretions of a notorious ex-abbot. In the course of attributing the English aggression at Painscastle to Hubert Walter, Gerald has characterized the archbishop’s practice of excommunicating opponents of the Plantagenet crown as a Satanic abuse of the spiritual sword of his office. What better counter-charge could there have been than to claim that this “Devil” of an archbishop not only shed blood in violation of canon law, but also that he deliberately sent his temporal enemies to hell?

I must concede, however, that some of the most damaging rumors about public figures are the ones that turn out to be true. We must bear this in mind also when confronted with the Wechelen story. The whispers among the native Welsh that Gerald had somehow been involved on the “wrong side” of Painscastle may indeed have been justified. Historians can never know with any certainty whether or not, on the eve of the
battle, Gerald sent useful intelligence - or at the very least his informed counsel and advice – to the English force assembled at Hay. Indeed, despite Gerald’s strenuous denial, it is out of the question to exonerate him. Gerald wrote the *De Rebus a se Gestis* some time between 1208 and 1216, well after the St David’s affair caused him to take up a stridently “Welsh” public posture; he projected that posture backward over his entire career. Gerald may have been kin to the Lord Rhys, but for most of his public life he took the part of Henry II and Richard I. Indeed, Gerald collected a pension from the Plantagenet court until 1201. I have found no evidence that Gerald earned this pension by going on eyre, serving at the exchequer, or undertaking any other curial labor over the course of his decade-long service to the Plantagenets that was not directly connected to the maintenance of royal policy in either Ireland or Wales.

The *De Rebus*, therefore, does not accurately reflect Gerald’s pre-1199 political loyalties. It is important to remember that the Painscastle incident actually occurred in 1198, the year before Gerald had been elected by the chapter of St David’s. In Chapter One, I demonstrated that, in the *De Rebus a se Gestis*, Gerald deliberately obscured his activities from 1191 until his election by the chapter of St. David’s in 1199. If Gerald constructed his autobiography to obscure his political commitments during that decade, and in particular to conceal his involvement in the ecclesiastical and political strife of Deheubarth in 1197, it is unreasonable to grant that same work veracity for 1198. Therefore, Gerald cannot be exonerated from involvement in Painscastle.

600 Citing the Pipe Rolls, Robert Bartlett wrote: “He received 5d a day (7 pounds 12 shillings 1 d a year) from 1191-2 until midway through 1201-2, when this revenue was reallocated to two other clerks.” Bartlett, p. 19, n. 39.
Indeed, in 1198 Gerald may have had a strong personal motive to urge the English to attack the Welsh force besieging Painscastle. Gerald had almost no connection to Gwenwynwyn, the prince of Powys and the commander of the native Welsh at the fateful siege of Painscastle.\footnote{Other than excommunicating his father Owen Cyfeiliog ten years earlier when Owen refused to meet with Archbishop Baldwin during the preaching tour through Wales. Journey, p. 202; Giraldi Cambrensis Opera VI, p. 144.} However, Gwenwynwyn’s uprising enjoyed widespread support; according to the Chronica Wallia, the Prince of Powys undertook it “with the support of all the forces of all the princes of Wales.”\footnote{Ann. Cam., p. 104.} This included princes of Deheubarth. In the Symbolum Electorum, Gerald wrote that the Lord Rhys’s sons had plundered his prebend at Mathry in 1197 because they believed that Gerald had insisted upon the excommunication of their father.\footnote{Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I, p. 332.}

Gerald never specified which of Rhys’s (estimated eighteen) sons had done this. Indeed Rhys’s two most prominent sons cannot be connected to both the plundering of Gerald’s lands and to Painscastle. Because he wanted his father to have a Christian burial, Rhys’s legitimate heir, Gruffydd, had taken the initiative in reconciling with Bishop Peter after Rhys had died excommunicate.\footnote{Annales Monasterii de Wintonia, in Annales Monastici vol. II, ed. Henry Richards Luard, Rolls Series 36, (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, and Green, 1865), ca. 1197, p. 66.} Between the excommunication and the family reconciliation with the church, Gruffydd might have been responsible for attacking Gerald’s lands. However, Gruffydd was not involved in besieging Painscastle.
In fact, Gruffydd had languished in an English dungeon at Corfe for the previous year; he was only released, in August of 1198, because his English captors vainly hoped he could negotiate successfully with Gwenwynwyn.\textsuperscript{605} Rhys’s determined bastard Maelgwyn, who had sold his half-brother Gruffydd into captivity, was almost certainly allied with Gwenwynwyn at the time of the Painscastle siege. There is some evidence suggesting that Maelgwyn had been in exile at the time of Rhys’s death, however.\textsuperscript{606} If this is true, Maelgwyn could not have carried out the revenge-plundering of Gerald’s land. Even if these two most prominent sons of Rhys cannot be linked to both events, approximately sixteen warrior princes remain, any combination of whom might have both plundered Gerald and served under Gwenwynwyn at Painscastle. This includes Maelgwyn’s occasional ally Hywel Sais (c. 1148-c.1204), who was more than capable of the deed.\textsuperscript{607}

While Gerald was vague about which of Rhys’s sons had plundered him, one of his letters suggests that he may have reacted to the event with a deep and general resentment, at least for a time, toward all the native Welsh. A letter of the same year preserves an explicit statement of this bitterness. Sometime in 1197, Gerald wrote to the chancellor of the Roman curia concerning a legal appeal he had lately made against Bishop Peter de Leia.\textsuperscript{608} Gerald denounced his foreign bishop to the chancellor of the

\textsuperscript{605} Lloyd, p. 159.

\textsuperscript{606} Brut, p. 179.

\textsuperscript{607} Lloyd, pp. 154-155.

\textsuperscript{608} This appeal was not only a reaction to the damage Gerald believed the bishop had done to his reputation by publicly attributing the excommunication of Rhys to his advice; 252
papal curia partly on the grounds that Peter de Leia had become Welsh! Bishop Peter, he wrote, was “a truly barbarous bishop, prelate of a barbarous region, and making use of barbarous ways in the customary manner…”

The plundering of his estates and his alienation from the princely house of Deheubarth might well have given Gerald motive to advise the English to attack the Welsh force at Painscastle. He certainly had means. The English force that crushed the Welsh outside Painscastle was commanded by two men Gerald knew well and had served with in the Plantagenet curia: Geoffrey fitz Peter and Hubert Walter. Both these men knew Gerald to be a man with extensive knowledge of the politics of native Wales. While Gerald did not enjoy an amicable relationship with Hubert Walter, he admired Geoffrey fitz Peter and seems to have remained on friendly terms with the justiciar even under the most trying of political circumstances.

In addition to motive and means, Gerald had the opportunity to influence the decisions leading up to the August, 1198 battle. Contrary to the impression he sought to give in the *De Rebus a se Gestis*, Gerald had not really withdrawn from politics after he left the Plantagenet service c. 1194 and he had not withdrawn totally into theological

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Gerald lodged the appeal to frustrate the bishop’s reallocation of a portion of his income. Richter, *Giraldus Cambrensis* n. 49, p. 98; p. 93.


610 This is particularly remarkable in light of the fact that Geoffrey, at the height of the St. David’s controversy, had confiscated Gerald’s possessions. *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera III*, pp. 206-7; 214.
study at Lincoln. The bitter complaints Gerald made in his personal correspondence about being blamed for Rhys’s excommunication in 1197, about the consequent pillaging of his lands, and about his ongoing squabbles with the bishop and chapter of St. David’s seem to indicate that if Gerald was not physically present in Wales during 1197, he most certainly continued to involve himself in the affairs of southern Wales.

Indeed, even if Gerald actually spent all of 1198 at Lincoln, evidence from the *De Rebus a se Gestis* proves that there was no logistical impediment to his sending timely advice to the English force assembled at Hay. In Book III chapter x of the *De Rebus*, we learn that Gerald, ensconced at Lincoln, corresponded with surprising celerity with the chapter of St. David’s in southwestern Wales. Gerald’s home chapter initiated correspondence with Gerald sometime after Christmas of 1198. In their letter, the canons expressed the expectation that Gerald could draft complex legal instruments and send them to St. David’s before the feast of St. Hilary (January 14, 1199). This proves that even if Gerald was at Lincoln in summer of 1198, there was enough time for him both to have learned of the late July siege of Painscastle and to have sent his advice to Hay – a town far closer to Lincoln than St. David’s – before the fateful battle took place on August 13.

The accumulated silences and evasions in the *De Rebus* concerning Gerald’s activities from 1194-1199, when considered in combination with the esoteric layer of the Wechelen story, ought to make us very suspicious. In the *De Rebus a se Gestis* Gerald, contrary to his tendency elsewhere in his writings to elevate his own importance and

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611 Please see Chapter 1, pp. 78-9.
associate himself with great men and events, passed over in silence the final rebellion of his cousin Rhys, the spectacularly failed negotiations of 1197 and consequent kidnapping and abuse of his bishop, Rhys’s excommunication (for which Gerald was himself blamed), and the once-mighty prince’s gruesome postmortem flogging. While Gerald rarely neglected the opportunity to rehearse any slight or injury he received at the hands of others, in the *De Rebus a se Gestis* he not only neglected to mention Bishop Peter’s false accusation that he had urged the excommunication of his kinsmen, he wrote nothing about the plundering of his Welsh prebend by his own cousins! In light of the events of 1197, it is fair to wonder if Gerald concocted the esoteric version of the Wechelen story to deny a scurrilous rumor or whether he created the “anchorite of Llowes,” “the Devil,” and the “angel of Satan” to obscure an uncomfortable truth.
Chapter 5: Recontextualizing the *De Rebus a se Gestis*

The *De Rebus a se Gestis* lacks a dedicatory preface; that is to say, no evidence has survived that Gerald had inscribed the work to any prospective patron. In the prologue of the *De Rebus*, Gerald claimed that he had written the work for posterity and with the expectation that someone in the future might again take up the metropolitan claims of St. David’s.\(^6\) There is no reason to doubt that the status of St. David’s and the good opinion of posterity did indeed motivate the author of the *De Rebus*, but these were not the only, or even the chief purposes of the work. If I am correct that, beneath the Wechelen story, Gerald occluded an elaborate denial that he had been involved on the English side in the Painscastle disaster of 1198, this begs the question: “For whom did Gerald intend the esoteric layer of the Wechelen story?” This question in turn begs another, “For whom among his contemporaries did Gerald intend the *De Rebus a se Gestis*?”

The Wechelen story itself, when considered alongside both Gerald’s straitened personal circumstances and the political landscape of native Wales during the years Gerald composed the *De Rebus*, c. 1208-1216, all point to Llywelyn “the Great” ab

\(^6\) J. S. Brewer, the editor of the Rolls Series edition of the *De Rebus a se Gestis* designated this first section of the work the “Prologue.” The manuscript offers no such heading, but for the sake of convenience I will follow Brewer. (London, British Library, MS Cotton, Tib. B. xiii).
Iorwerth (1173-1240), prince of Gwynedd, as the object of Gerald’s authorial attentions. At first glance, it might seem unlikely that Gerald would have repaired to Gwynedd for a patron. This northernmost of the native Welsh principalities was the most “Welsh,” the poorest, and the most remote geographically from St. David’s. Furthermore, while it is indisputable that Gerald intended a few of his literary productions for Welsh clerics – he wrote two hagiographical works for St. David’s and claimed that he had written the *Gemma Ecclesiastica* for the edification of the clergy of Brecon – no one has ever suggested that Gerald wrote anything for the Welsh lay elite. Every lay patron to whom Gerald dedicated work was a member of the Plantagenet royal family. Furthermore, all but three of the literary productions Gerald dedicated to clerics were inscribed to powerful prelates in England.

Nevertheless, during the years Gerald is thought to have written the *De Rebus a se Gestis* he found himself cut off from his old sources of patronage; he did not have very many options. Furthermore, it would not have been a “shot in the dark” for Gerald to have composed the *De Rebus* with the prince of Gwynedd in mind. Gerald knew Llywelyn. A close examination of the extant chapter headings of the missing chapters of the *De Rebus a se Gestis*, when considered in concert with what Gerald wrote in his other St. David’s works, the *De Invectionibus* and the *De Iure et Statu Menevensis Ecclesie*, indicate that Gerald had co-operated closely with Llywelyn during the St. David’s controversy. Llywelyn had supported Gerald in his quest to obtain metropolitan status for St. David’s. Gerald, for his part, had pleaded at Rome on behalf of one Rotoland, a man whose quest to be recognized as the bishop of Bangor had been underwritten by the prince of Gwynedd.
Individual strands do not, by themselves, constitute a rope - but a rope is nothing more than the combination of individual strands. Likewise, none of the three individual strands of evidence that I will present, when considered in isolation, prove that Gerald wrote the *De Rebus a se Gestis* to obtain for himself the attention and patronage of Llywelyn ab Iorwerth of Gwynedd. However, when three strands of evidence are bound together – namely, Gerald’s straitened circumstances during the years when he was thought to have composed the *De Rebus*; his record of both admiring and co-operating with the prince of Gwynedd; and the message of the esoteric layer of the Wechelen story – these three strands tie the *De Rebus a se Gestis* to Llywelyn.

The *De Rebus a se Gestis* and Posterity

While I believe that Gerald’s chief purpose in composing the *De Rebus a se Gestis* was to make himself an attractive object of patronage to Llywelyn of Gwynedd, this in no way contradicts or negates Gerald’s express desire to preserve his deeds for posterity. Gerald saw his struggle to obtain metropolitan status for the see of St. David’s in an heroic light; in the Prologue of the *De Rebus* he introduced the matter accordingly:

> It was a custom of the ancient Greeks to commend the deeds of famous men to the memory of after-generations in such a manner as might cause them to be the better and the more clearly remembered. And this they did, firstly by portraits and secondly by writing, to the end that posterity might be inspired to the laudable imitation of the great virtues of days gone by. For no man is kindled to imitation by hearing or reading the fabulous records of deeds that are extravagant or impossible, but when a man’s true virtue flashes forth, then the virtuous mind is uplifted to imitate many deeds and to take them to heart. Wherefore I have taken upon me to set forth in scholarly fashion, yet simply and without elaboration, the famous deeds of a man of our own time...

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613 Butler, p. 33; “Inclitorum gesta virorum quondam Grai veteres primo per imagines deinde per scripta tenacios et expressius memoriae commendabant; quatinus exacti
Furthermore, Gerald saw the metropolitan status of St. David’s as a cause worthy of heroic exertions; he expressed the desire that someone in the future might, inspired by his example, take up the St. David’s case again.\footnote{Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I, pp. 19-20.}

This is typical of Gerald; throughout his writings he expressed his faith in the power of posterity to vindicate his present efforts, literary or otherwise. This is perhaps best expressed in a letter Gerald wrote to William de Monte (d. 1213), dean of Lincoln Cathedral. William had criticized some of the more outlandish material in the \textit{Topographia Hibernica}. Having responded to the particulars of William’s criticisms, Gerald concluded:

Furthermore, since books, however outstanding, cannot please spiteful minds while the author is still alive, we are taking care – and always have – to defend our books by pen and paper from the biting attacks of rivals while we are still living, as is clear from the first preface to the Prophetic History. We firmly believe and indeed know for certain that with posterity there will be no spite after our death, and a man’s honour will serve as his defence according to his merits. Their writings will protect themselves by their own worth, and the works which cannot please now will truly be unable later to displease really. Just as now they are bitten and torn to pieces with sharp teeth, so later they will be praised to the skies as they deserve. So stop snapping at these books and tearing them apart so rudely, or else kindly return them to the author as quickly as possible.\footnote{Porro quoniam scripta quantumlibet egregia lividis ingenii auctorem superstite placere non possunt, nos opera nostra dum vivimus contra emulorum morsus litteris et scriptis, sicut ex prohemio patet \textit{Vaticinalis Historie} primo, defendere pro posse temporis virtutum extantium aemula posteritas posset imitazione laudabili ad similia provocari. Fabulosis enim seu relationibus seu lectionibus, quibus hyperbolica promuntur et impossibilia, ad imitationem nullus accenditur. Sed ubi vera viri virtus emicat, ibi ad imitandum et virilia complexandum mens virtuosa consurgit. Unde viri cuiusdam nostri temporis inclite gesta, quae vel oculis conspexi vel ipso referente notavi, scolastico stilo, simplici tamen et non exquisito…” \textit{Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I}, p. 19.}
Gerald believed that for the talented littérature, the best revenge was exacted by the pen. In his first oration before Innocent III, Gerald introduced his response to Hubert Walter’s letter of invective by saying, “I will deal with his arguments in detail as they occur, that he may know what a vain waste of effort it is and how it invites retaliation, to offend men of learning by letters such as these… Later in the St. David’s case, Gerald concluded a brutal attack on Hubert Walter’s personal life: “Let him, then, learn from this and discern how foolish it is, how dangerous, and liable to retaliation to offend a man of letters by words or deeds. Let him learn and know how much more serious are the wounds inflicted by the pen than by the spear. Those, to be sure, scar over; these, however, must contend with eternity.” In a letter to Geoffrey de Henlaw (d. 1214), bishop of St. David’s, Gerald wrote “…wounds inflicted by the pen are mightier than

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curavimus et curamus, absque {dubio} credentes, quin immo et certi existentes, quod apud posteros et post fata, cum livore cessante suus ex merito quemque tuebitur honor, ipsa se sua dignitate defendent, et que nunc placere nequent, tunc revera disiplicere non poterunt, et sicut nunc undique mordaci dente roduntur et laniuntur, sic dignis tunc demum laudibus et preconios extollentur. Aut itaque libellos prescriptos rodere de cetero et verbis minus discretis dilacerare cessetis, aut ipsos auctori suo quam cicius resignare curet.” Spec. Duo., pp. 172-175.

616 Butler, p. 170; De Invect., p. 85.

those by the sword. Sword wounds generally scar with the healing influence of time, but those of the pen have to contend with immortality in the eternal chains of literature."  

It is, therefore, entirely reasonable to accept Gerald’s assertion that he wrote the De Rebus a se Gestis out of a desire to influence posterity; it is unreasonable, however, to assume that this was his only motive in composing the work. Two clues in the text of the De Rebus suggest Gerald also had his contemporaries in mind when he wrote. For one thing, it seems unlikely that the esoteric layer of the Wechelen story could have been intended for posterity. If Gerald was contending with a rumor that he had advised the English to attack the Welsh, it would have been far wiser to ignore such a rumor entirely than to dedicate a pivotal chapter of the De Rebus to refuting it esoterically. Rumors are fleeting things, after all, but Gerald expected his literary productions to be immortal.

Furthermore, in Book II chapter xxiv, after claiming that his time in the royal service had been spent primarily in study, Gerald discreetly hinted to a potential patron how his modest needs might be met:

Wherefore his chief desire was this and this alone – to complete his studies and, above all, to perfect his knowledge of theology in the schools; and further that he might have an honourable competence to enable him to do this and to acquire and keep a fine store of books and authors such as that Faculty demands. For, as he was wont himself to say, studious minds should ever seek such a competence as may nourish and not impede study, and as may not by its abundance choke the diligence required by so noble a task, but sustain it by its attainment of the happy mean.  

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619 Butler, p. 122.
Both Michael Richter and Robert Bartlett have suggested that Gerald wrote the *De Rebus a se Gestis* sometime between 1208 and 1216.\(^\text{620}\) Gerald’s circumstances during these years were quite difficult, both in terms of his diminished political influence and his declining material well-being. We can be quite confident that Gerald would have responded to these circumstances by seeking a wealthy and powerful patron. Because his usual sources of patronage were unavailable to him, it is not out of the question that Gerald might have been desperate enough to turn to a Welsh prince to provide for him what King John would not, and what his remaining friends in the hierarchy of the English church could not.

After his 1203 capitulation in the St. David’s case, Gerald went to live with his cousin Meiler Fitz Henry (d. 1220), the justiciar of Ireland from 1199 to 1208. He made a penitential pilgrimage to Rome in 1206. In 1208, following Meiler’s failure to curb the power and influence of the legendary William the Marshall (1146-1219) in Ireland, Gerald’s kinsman was removed from the justiciarship by King John.\(^\text{621}\) At this point, Gerald’s straitened circumstances, 1208-1216

\(^{620}\) Both Bartlett and Richter are in agreement about the approximate range of dates, 1208-1216, within which Gerald could have written the *De Rebus*. The *De Rebus* cannot have been begun before 1208, as Gerald wrote of visiting his cousin Meiler in Ireland, “tunc regni justiciarum…” (*Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I*, p. 112). Meiler was removed from the justiciarship of Ireland by John in 1208. The work cannot have been completed much later than 1216, because a large portion of Book VI of the *De Invectionibus* was copied from the *De Rebus a se Gestis*, and evidence from Book V of the *De Invectionibus* suggests that work was itself completed after Innocent III had died (1216). *Spec. Duo.*, pp. xx-xxi.

\(^{621}\) David Crouch treated this peculiar interlude, in which the mercurial King John turned against the man who would ultimately serve as regent to his young son, in some detail. It
Gerald seems to have fallen on hard times. While Gerald’s circumstances did not become entirely miserable until late in the first decade of the thirteenth century, his financial misfortunes can be traced back to the deal he struck with the archbishop of Canterbury in autumn of 1203.

Due to his intransigence during the St. David’s controversy, Gerald’s financial situation had sustained punishing blows between 1199 and 1203. When John had declared him an enemy of the realm in 1202, Gerald lost the stipend he had secured through his years of service to the court.\(^{622}\) Around that same time he had also lost his prebend at Hereford.\(^{623}\) Furthermore, at the height of the controversy, Gerald’s richest prebend, Mathry, was despoiled by the sheriff of Pembroke.\(^{624}\)

Gerald wrote that he gave up his struggle for the metropolitan rights of St. David’s primarily because his case had proven hopeless.\(^{625}\) As a part of their negotiated settlement, Archbishop Hubert Walter had agreed to help Gerald meet the tremendous expenses of the previous years’ legal wrangle by granting him sixty marks of compensation. The archbishop made good the first installment of twenty marks, but died

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\(^{623}\) *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera III*, p. 237.

\(^{624}\) *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera III*, p. 227.

\(^{625}\) *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera III*, p. 322.
before the rest could be paid. Their agreement had been a personal one, so Gerald never recovered the other forty marks.

Gerald felt that the chapter of St. David’s had deserted him during his long struggle, so when he conceded to Hubert Walter he claimed that he no longer wanted to serve as the archdeacon of Brecon. As part of the deal he struck with the archbishop, Gerald requested that his archdeaconry be bestowed upon his nephew Gerald fitz Philip - a maneuver far less unusual than it was uncanonical. Young Gerald was to have assumed the title and duties of archdeacon immediately, but his uncle was to have retained most of the revenues to support himself in his old age. According to Gerald, his nephew – at the prompting of his tutor, William de Capella – reneged on their financial arrangement and instead began to keep all the revenues derived from the archdeaconry for himself. This occurred c. 1208. Ultimately, young Gerald went so far as to make a legal appeal to Rome against his uncle and benefactor. The young archdeacon further betrayed his uncle by revealing the intemperate opinions that the elder Gerald had expressed privately concerning the great men of the realm.

626 Spec. Duo., p. xxxi.
627 Giraldi Cambrensis Opera III, pp. 325-6.
628 Gerald wrote that he had done this because of his love for young Gerald’s father, his brother, Philip. He clearly felt badly about it, however, and he asked the pope himself to approve the matter when he made his penitential journey to Rome in 1206. Spec. Duo., Ep. 7, p. 256.
sort of things Gerald was willing to commit to writing concerning the royal family (among others), one can only imagine how intemperate his table talk might have been! Melier’s loss of position, along with his nephew’s betrayal, must have severely constrained Gerald’s remaining revenues and influence. True, in his invective against young Gerald and his tutor William, Gerald described himself as having been “wealthy and rich.” However, without the revenues of his chief ecclesiastical office this cannot have continued to be the case.

Gerald ought easily to have been able to write himself out of his post-1208 distress - his Irish works in particular were popular and widely copied. He had often employed his literary gifts in the quest for patronage; while not all of Gerald’s works include a dedicatory preface to a particular patron, many do. When these works are considered alongside the hagiographical works Gerald wrote with an eye to pleasing either his own chapter of St. David’s or to attract the patronage of the wealthier bishops and chapters at Lincoln and Hereford, one can easily detect in Gerald’s output a pattern of writing to please a potential benefactor. Gerald most often resorted to members of the Plantagenet royal family or to important curial/ecclesiastical magnates in England for patronage. A brief review should be adequate both to prove this point, and to contextualize Gerald’s financial distress post-1208.


633 Bartlett, p. 213.

Gerald dedicated various recensions of the *Topographia Hibernica* to Henry II and to his son, Count Richard; he also presented Archbishop Baldwin of Canterbury with a copy during their preaching tour of Wales in 1188. He dedicated recensions of the *Expugnatio Hibernica* to King Richard and King John. His Welsh works were inscribed to potential ecclesiastical patrons. Gerald dedicated the first recension of the *Itinerarium Kambriae* to William Longchamp. This dedication must have proven embarrassing in light of Longchamp’s ignominious expulsion from England in late 1191 (and in light of the venomous description of Longchamp that Gerald penned in his *Vita Galfridi Archiepiscopi Eboracensis*); there is evidence that Gerald attempted to suppress it. Subsequent editions were dedicated to St. Hugh of Lincoln and Stephen Langton, archbishop of Canterbury. The first recension of the *Descriptio Kambriae* was dedicated to Hubert Walter, archbishop of Canterbury. Gerald also presented St. Hugh with a copy. Gerald’s later works were often dedicated to, or meant for, Archbishop Stephen Langton. In addition to the second recension of the *Descriptio Kambriae*, Gerald dedicated the *Speculum Ecclesie* and the *De Iure et Statu Menevensis Ecclesie* to the scholarly archbishop.

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635 Dimock, *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera V*, lli.


637 Dimock, *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera VI*, xxvi.

638 Dimock, *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera VI*, xxix.

639 Dimock, *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera VI*, xxxix.

True, not all of Gerald’s works were inscribed to a potential patron, but there is no more reason to suppose that these were undertaken in a spirit of *ars gratia artis* than there is to believe that his choices of hagiographical subjects were made without regard to his own self-interest. For example, while the *Symbolum Electorum* and the *Gemma Ecclesiastica*, both written on the eve of Gerald’s election to the see of St. David’s, lack a dedicatory preface, I suspect the reason for this is that Gerald composed both these works with an eye to his impending election.\(^{641}\) Both works were undertaken when Bishop Peter de Leia (d. 1198) of St. David’s was known to be in ill-health and both present their author as a conscientious ecclesiastic as well as a man of excellent education. Under these circumstances, Gerald did not require a patron as much as an acceptable public image. Indeed, Gerald presented the *Gemma* to Innocent III in his first audience before the pope in December of 1199.\(^{642}\)

While I admit that I am not at all certain why the *De Invectionibus* was never inscribed to any potential patron, the lack of a dedicatory preface in most of Gerald’s other works is not mysterious. The *Speculum Duorum* is not dedicated to any particular patron for the obvious reason that the work is in the nature of an open letter defending the author against the accusations of his nephew. Gerald explicitly refused to dedicate his final work, the *De Principis Instructione*, to any patron; instead he used the completion of his final work as an opportunity both to register his disgust with his contemporaries

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\(^{641}\) Please see Introduction, pp. 19; 21.

\(^{642}\) Gerald presented six books to Pope Innocent, but he named only the *Gemma*. Of his literary gift to the Pope, Gerald wrote that others presented the pope with money, but he brought books: “Praesentant vobis alii libras, sed nos libros.” *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I*, p. 119.
because they did not recognize the value of his work and to invoke the favorable attention of a posterity better able to appreciate his efforts.\textsuperscript{643} Such bitterness itself demonstrates, in a back-handed way, that Gerald had expected his work to attract the bounty of the wealthy and powerful.

Clearly, then, throughout his life Gerald was in the habit of seeking patronage through his literary efforts; whenever Gerald sought patronage he turned either to the Plantagenet royal family or the curial/ecclesiastical princes of the English church. After 1208, both of these potential sources of patronage dried up. During the St. David’s controversy, Gerald had aggravated King John to the point – in 1202 - that he declared Gerald an enemy of the realm. Nevertheless, c. 1209-1210, Gerald attempted to attract John’s generosity by dedicating to him a new recension of the \textit{Expugnatio Hibernica}.\textsuperscript{644} Perhaps Gerald was encouraged to do this because c. 1206, during the struggle over the pope’s imposition of Langton as the archbishop of Canterbury, John had toyed with revenging himself on the archbishopric by reviving the St. David’s controversy.\textsuperscript{645} At any rate, Gerald’s gift came to nothing. This left ecclesiastical patronage. Despite the passion with which Gerald had pursued the St. David’s controversy, he had not burned all his bridges among the English prelacy. For example Eustace (d. 1215), bishop of Ely, was still friendly toward Gerald.\textsuperscript{646} However, the interdict imposed upon England by

\textsuperscript{643} \textit{Giraldi Cambrensis Opera VIII}, p. 6.

\textsuperscript{644} This would appear to have come to nothing. Bartlett, p. 61, n. 13.

\textsuperscript{645} \textit{De Invect.}, pp. 202-203.

\textsuperscript{646} Gerald recorded his friendly disposition in the \textit{De Iure et Statu Menevensis Ecclesie}. \textit{Giraldi Cambrensis Opera III}, pp. 222-223; 231; 232; 297.
Innocent III from 1208 to 1214 further hampered Gerald’s prospects by emptying the realm of literate and deep-pocketed prelates.

Gerald could not expect any relief from his home diocese. Gerald’s relationship with the bishop and chapter of St. David’s had never been an easy one, and most of his fellow canons, subject to the crushing pressure of the archbishop of Canterbury, had turned against Gerald over the course of his 1199-1203 legal battle. Gerald could not forgive this. Furthermore, he believed that Bishop Geoffrey de Henlaw, the man imposed upon St. David’s in his place, had played an active part in his nephew’s treachery and had been confiscating his revenues unlawfully.\textsuperscript{647}

While Gerald seems to have moved back to Lincoln after Meiler was removed from the justiciarship of Ireland, his prospects for substantial patronage there cannot have been good. Gerald claimed that some time after St. Hugh had died (November, 1200), the chapter of Lincoln had considered him as a potential candidate for the see.\textsuperscript{648} This seems unlikely, but even if it was true, by the later years of the decade circumstances had changed for the worse. After John was personally excommunicated by Innocent III in November 1209, the bishop of Lincoln, Hugh de Wells (d. 1235), went into exile. He did not return until 1213. Furthermore, Gerald did not enjoy the best of relations with at least two of the more prominent members of the chapter of Lincoln. The chancellor, William de Monte, seems at some point during the decade to have taken offence at Gerald’s

\textsuperscript{647} Spec. Duo., p. xxxiii; Ep. 6, pp. 208-241.

\textsuperscript{648} Giraldi Cambrensis Opera III, p. 240
Even if this controversy did not permanently sour their relationship, William went into exile in Scotland on account of the interdict and did not return; he died there in 1213. John of Tynemouth (d. 1221), another eminent canon of Lincoln who enjoyed the rich prebend of Langford Ecclesia, was a renowned canon lawyer who had been one of Hubert Walter’s chief proxies before the pope during the St. David’s controversy. When Gerald was captured in Burgundy on his way home from Rome in 1203 by the castellan of Châtillon-sur-Seine, he managed to free himself from captivity by informing the grasping castellan that John, who was traveling through the area at the same time, was the servant of the rich and powerful archbishop of Canterbury and a far better prospect for ransom. Like Odysseus fleeing the Island of the Cyclopes, Gerald could not resist taunting the newly-captured John as he rode away. This moment of hubris cannot have helped Gerald’s prospects at Lincoln in the years that followed.

Please see above, pp. 259-60; Spec. Duo., Ep. 3, pp. 168-175.


Giraldi Cambrensis Opera III, pp. 291-297.

Giraldi Cambrensis Opera III, p. 296.
After 1208, then, Gerald could add to the removal of his cousin from the justiciarship in Ireland: a lost pension from the king; a lost prebend in Hereford; alienated archidiaconal income from Wales; and alienated chapters in St. David’s and, perhaps, Lincoln. By the beginning of 1209, all the wealthiest princes of the church were abroad and England lay under interdict. It was during this unhappy period, between 1208 and 1216, that Gerald composed the De Rebus a se Gestis. If it is true that Gerald’s need for patronage must have been very great for him to have made the leap from seeking the patronage of members of the Plantagenet dynasty and the wealthier prelates of the English church to seeking the patronage of a native Welsh prince, it is equally evident that his situation between 1208 and 1216 was dire indeed. But was Llywelyn ab Iorwerth of Gwynedd a suitable object of Gerald’s literary attentions? How did Gerald perceive the man the Welsh remembered as Llywelyn “the Great?”

The Rise of Llywelyn ab Iorwerth and of Gwynedd

If the years 1208 to 1216 brought personal, material, and professional setbacks for Gerald, that same period saw an almost uninterrupted rise in the fortunes of Llywelyn ab Iorwerth. Indeed there can be no doubt that, if not by 1208 then certainly by 1213, Llywelyn had obtained power and prestige far exceeding that which had accrued to the Lord Rhys of Deheubarth (1132-1197) in the previous generation. Llywelyn was born in 1173, to Iorwerth Drwyndwn, a prince of Gwynedd, and Margaret, daughter of Madog ap
Maredudd. At the death of Owain Gwynedd in 1170, Owain’s kinsmen had observed the custom of partible inheritance that plagued every polity of native Wales; as a result, this northern-most Welsh principality forfeited leadership of the native Welsh to Deheubarth, in the south. Llywelyn began his struggle to dominate Gwynedd at an early age. In the *Itinerarium Kambriae*, Gerald noted Llywelyn’s 1188 defeat of his uncles, David and Rhodri; kinsmen who had taken possession of the lands of Llywelyn’s father. During the 1190’s, and in defiance of Welsh custom, Llywelyn pursued a policy of extending his personal domination over all of Gwynedd. In 1194, he drove his uncle Rhodri out of Anglesey. By 1197, he had driven his uncle Dafydd out of Gwynedd entirely. He did not restrict his aggression to *Pura Wallia*; by 1199, Llywelyn had taken the border fortress of Mold from the earl of Chester; around that time he began to refer to himself as “prince of the whole of North Wales.”

His power in northern Wales was such that King John, in the first decade of the thirteenth century, recognized it twice: first by treaty, in 1201, and then, in 1205, by granting Llywelyn the hand of his natural daughter Joan. During this same period, Llywelyn began to threaten the other principalities of native Wales. In 1202 he was narrowly dissuaded from attacking Gwenwynwyn, the prince of Powys (the middle

654 Lloyd, 160.
655 Please see below, pp. 283-4.
656 Lloyd, p. 161.
657 Davies, 239.
658 Lloyd, 176; Davies, 239.
659 Davies, 239.
principality of native Wales located along the march of England between Deheubarth in the south and Gwynedd in the north). While he did not attack Powys, Llywelyn did confiscate for himself the cantref of Penllyn when its lord, Elise ap Madog, proved contumacious on the eve of the prospective campaign.\textsuperscript{660}

Six years later, Llywelyn seized an opportunity presented by King John’s displeasure with Gwenwynwyn. The prince of Powys had attempted to capitalize on the fall of the de Braose family to assert himself in central Wales. William de Braose (d. 1211) had been a favorite of John’s, but the mercurial king took the opportunity of William’s accumulated debts to the crown to crush his once-powerful magnate. The de Braose family possessed territories along the Welsh march and Gwenwynwyn attempted to seize a portion of these by force. When his aggressive policy failed, Gwenwynwyn had to repair to the court of King John to negotiate. John imposed crushing terms and refused to allow Gwenwynwyn to return to Powys until he had surrendered hostages. During Gwenwynwyn’s forced absence, Llywelyn successfully invaded southern Powys and redistributed the lands he took to his allies, including two grandsons of the Lord Rhys, Rhys and Owain ap Gruffydd.\textsuperscript{661} John expressed annoyance with Llywelyn’s boldness, but the two men remained on good terms; indeed, Llywelyn assisted his father-in-law in his Scottish campaign of 1209.

Between 1210-1212 King John, thwarted on the Continent, vented his aggression against the Celtic fringe of his empire. The prince of Gwynedd weathered devastating

\textsuperscript{660} Lloyd, p. 177.

\textsuperscript{661} Lloyd, p. 182.
setbacks, but emerged from these years stronger than ever. In the summer of 1210, John pursued his vendetta against William de Braose to Ireland. His massive royal expeditionary force succeeded not only in crushing the de Braose family, but also in imposing the king’s will on the powerful marcher families of Ireland. John’s success in projecting his authority over Ireland is probably what motivated the king to undertake a similar exercise in Wales. In early spring of 1211, John made his first incursion into Pura Wallia. Llywelyn and his allies were forced to retreat deep into Gwynedd and rely for their deliverance upon hostile weather. Frustrated by a lack of provisions, John retreated; in July, he invaded again. Over the course of his second expedition, John drove deep into Gwynedd. He took Bangor and physically abused the bishop. Llywelyn had to retreat into the mountains of Snowdon and send his wife Joan to intercede for him with her father. John stopped short of crushing Llywelyn, but he imposed an immense tribute and confiscated four cantrefs of Gwynedd.

John enjoyed similar military success in southern Wales, but his overwhelming application of force proved to be bad strategy. As the king began to erect new castles in native Wales, for example at Aberyswyth, he united the Welsh against him. If Llywelyn had caused the native Welsh elite to feel threatened by his power in 1208, John’s actions after his humbling of Llywelyn in 1211 seemed far more menacing. David Stephenson wrote that John’s lordship was acceptable to the native Welsh so long as it remained “nebulous;” when it looked as though he might rule directly, these same princes preferred

662 Lloyd, pp. 190-192.
663 Lloyd, p. 191.
to take their chances with Llywelyn.\textsuperscript{664} By the end of 1211, some native Welsh princes had already begun to rebel against John. Llywelyn spent Easter of 1212 at the court of his father-in-law, but in June he had taken the side of the rebels and indeed had emerged as their leader.\textsuperscript{665} By summer, Llywelyn began to recover territory he had recently lost.

In August of 1212 at Chester, John responded by assembling an even more substantial military force than he had mustered the previous summer. John summoned not only soldiers, but 2,230 ditchers and carpenters and 6,100 laborers; W. L. Warren believed John’s plan was to repeat the invasion of Gwynedd, crush Llywelyn, and by the construction of castles bring Wales “permanently under direct English rule.”\textsuperscript{666} Fortunately for Llywelyn, John was forced to abandon his planned invasion because of rumors that his own barons might betray him and hand him over to the Welsh.\textsuperscript{667} Although the threat of another royal invasion dissipated by summer’s end, Llywelyn continued his aggressive policy. In December of 1215, with eleven princes serving under his command, Llywelyn undertook a very ambitious campaign against royal and marcher holdings in southern Wales. His success was astonishing; according to R. R. Davies, “by

\begin{footnotes}
\item[665] Lloyd, p. 192-3.
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Llywelyn had secured a position in Wales such as no prince had held since the coming of the Normans.”

Llywelyn was no mere raider. From early in his career he demonstrated a strategic awareness of broader European politics. Before the opportunity of a marriage to Joan, King John’s natural daughter, presented itself, Llywelyn had been negotiating with Pope Innocent III to marry the daughter of the King of Man. Llywelyn made bold steps toward the Plantagenet throne, including his treaty with King John in 1202, his marriage to Joan in 1205, and his service in Scotland in 1209. J. E. Lloyd reckoned that it was Llywelyn’s Easter, 1212 sojourn at the royal court that revealed to the prince John’s growing weakness vis a vis his barons. Certainly after John’s failure to launch his August 1212 expedition against him, Llywelyn did not hesitate to look elsewhere for allies – and he found them. According to the Waverley Annal, sometime in 1212 Innocent III lifted the interdict in Wales while at the same time releasing the Welsh from their allegiance to John. While it is not likely that Llywelyn had an active role in the pope’s decision, it certainly reflected the heightened European profile of the native Welsh. More impressive was the active role Llywelyn took in arranging an alliance with

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668 Davies, 242.

669 As a child, she had been married to Llywelyn’s uncle, Rhodri, and so he required a dispensation from the pope. Lloyd, p. 179.

670 Lloyd, p. 192.

671 When this papal encouragement of the Welsh revolt came to an end with John’s submission to Innocent in May of 1215, the pope went to the trouble of instructing his legate to negotiate a truce between the native Welsh and King John. Lloyd, pp. 192-3; 195; Annales de Waverleia, p. 268.
the King of France; Llywelyn was the pre-eminent Welsh signatory of the so-called, “Anglo French alliance of 1212.”

After the catastrophic defeat of his allies by the French king at Bouvines, in July, 1214, King John was permanently weakened and the baronial party in England that opposed him was emboldened. The following spring, hoping to cultivate allies, John courted Llywelyn and the other Welsh princes with visits from envoys and the release of hostages; it did not work. In May of 1215, upon learning that the baronial party had taken London, Llywelyn marched on England and took Shrewsbury. Provisions favorable to the Welsh rebels and to Llywelyn in particular were included in Magna Carta. Hostilities between King John and his rebellious barons did not end at Runnymede, of course. In autumn of 1215 the barons invited Louis, the son of King Philip of France, to take the English crown; there were French troops in England by November.

672 The document begins, “To his most excellent lord, Philip, by God’s grace king of the French, Llywelyn, prince of North Wales his faithful subject greeting and devoted and due service of fealty and reverence.” Llywelyn described his decision to enter into the alliance thusly, “… having summoned the council of my chief men and having obtained the common assent of all the princes of Wales, all of whom I have bound to you in the friendship of this treaty…” English Historical Documents 1189-1327, ed. David C. Douglas (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1975), pp. 306-7. See Davies, p. 243.

673 J. E. Lloyd believed that it was Giles de Braose (d. 1215), bishop of Hereford, who brought Llywelyn into the baronial party against the persecutor of his parents; the bishop’s brother Reginald de Braose (d. 1228) married Llywelyn’s daughter Gwladus around the same time. Lloyd, p. 197.

674 Clauses 56-58.
Such was the background of Llywelyn’s massive winter campaign of December, 1215. At the head of a nearly comprehensive alliance of native Welsh princes, Llywelyn invaded marcher territory in Southern Wales and took castles at Carmarthen, Kidwelly, Llanstephan, St. Clear’s, Laugharne, Narberth, and Newport. After Christmas, he added Cardigan and Cilgerran. In early 1216, Llywelyn consummated this triumph with an assembly of native Welsh princes at Aberdovey in which he single-handedly partitioned the southern Welsh districts. J. E. Lloyd wrote that Llywelyn, “wisely took no share for himself,” but instead adopted “the valuable status of overlord over the sons and grandsons of the Lord Rhys.”

Llywelyn was not only a wily rebel; there is also some evidence that the governance of Gwynedd had begun to be transformed under his leadership. At first glance, it seems most unlikely that anyone as cosmopolitan as Gerald would hope for patronage from the ruler of a place such as Gwynedd. R. R. Davies described Gwynedd as “probably the most thinly populated and probably economically the most backward of the native kingdoms.” However, Davies also described the northern principality as “remarkably self-sufficient economically.” In his 1984 study of the northern principality from the time of Llywelyn ab Iorwerth to the Plantagenet conquest of Wales in 1283, David Stephenson argued that the governance of Gwynedd had become increasingly sophisticated. While Stephenson conceded that the evidence for this period

675 Lloyd, p. 199.

676 Davies, p. 236.

677 Davies, p. 238.
is nothing like what is available “to anyone who is investigating English royal, or even seigniorial, administration of the same period,” he also concluded that what evidence there is indicates a profound change in the governance of the principality.678

Stephenson admitted that the prince of Gwynedd governed from an itinerant court and that he did not enjoy a specialized bureaucracy of the same sophistication as the Plantagenets. It is not certain whether Llywelyn even had a chancery; much of his administrative and diplomatic work depended upon the help of local ecclesiastical institutions.679 And yet, Stephenson believed that the administrative institutions Gwynedd did have were entirely adequate to the prince’s needs. Furthermore, he argued that the prince controlled demesne land in every commote and that this demesne land was being exploited intensively.680 The resources made available by Llywelyn’s demesne lands were not sufficient to match his needs, of course, but the same could be said of King John. It is more remarkable to note the progress in Gwynedd’s economy as this progress was reflected in the prince’s exactions. For example, while bondsmen still rendered their dues in kind, among freemen the rate of commutation was very high.681 Furthermore, Llywelyn was encouraging the development of ports and towns. Of the ability of Llywelyn and his successors to exploit the territory they controlled, Stephenson concluded:

678 Stephenson, p. xxxvi.
679 Stephenson, pp. 28; 53; 167.
680 Stephenson, p. 57.
681 Stephenson, p. 68
Patchy though the evidence is, it is quite clear that in the years before the Edwardian conquest the inhabitants of Gwynedd had been introduced to pressures of governance which were, potentially at least, as burdensome as those which confronted them after 1283... Even when it did not involve extortion, the intensive exploitation of resources had clearly involved rapid and unsettling change... In many respects the English royal administration of the post-conquest period, with its constant reference to the extents and statutes of the 1280’s, may have represented a return to stability in which, once more, custom triumphed.682

Llywelyn understood the importance of the church to his efforts. He enjoyed the consistent support of the prelacy of Gwynedd (the bishops of Bangor and St. Asaph). Indeed, he was willing to imitate in miniature the tactic used by the English kings (through the archbishop of Canterbury) against the native Welsh: when Madog ap Gruffydd Maelor planned a marriage contrary to Llywelyn’s wishes, the prince saw to it that Madog’s lands were placed under interdict.683

Llywelyn was a generous patron to the regular clergy. Around 1200, he founded a house of Augustinian canons on the Isle of Bardsey, where there had been a clas community since the sixth century. Indeed, Llywelyn assigned to the new Augustinian foundation lands and privileges many of which had originally belonged to the secularized clas community at Aberdaron.684 By taking this action, Llywelyn introduced into Gwynedd into the ongoing project of romanizing religious institutions in Celtic lands. Llywelyn was also generous to the Cistercians. His patronage of Aberconway proved to

682 Stephenson, p. 94.
683 Stephenson, pp. 167; 183.
be significant to Gerald’s efforts in the St. David’s controversy. Llywelyn may also have patronized the Hospitaller foundation at Dolgynwal.

As he does not seem to have had his own chancery, Llywelyn’s good relationship with the chapter of Bangor and the regular clergy of Gwynedd proved a useful substitute. Stephenson observed that Llywelyn enjoyed the services of more than one man with the title “Magister.” Gerald was favorably impressed by at least one such cleric; he identified Laurence, the prior of Bardsey as Llywelyn’s “nuncio,” and referred to him as an “eloquent man.” This was high praise from Gerald, who valued literacy and eloquence above nearly any other virtue.

Gwynedd and Llywelyn in the writings of Gerald of Wales

To argue convincingly that Gerald resorted to Llywelyn for patronage, it is not enough to show that both Gwynedd and her prince were becoming increasingly formidable – it is also necessary to prove that Gerald believed this to be the case. He did;

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685 See below, p. 286.
686 Lloyd, p. 224.
687 Stephenson, pp. 28; 53; 167
688 Stephenson, Appendix III.
689 “Lewelinus quoque Norwalliae princeps ad idem ipsos per nuncium suum, virum eloquentem, Laurentium priorem de Insula Sanctorum….” Giraldi Cambrensis Opera III, p. 197.
690 See Chapter Two, pp. 143-145.
indeed, Gerald esteemed Gwynedd and Llywelyn. In both his Welsh works, Gerald praised Gwynedd for containing the richest agricultural land in Wales. In the *Itinerarium*, he wrote of the island of Anglesey that:

This island produces far more grain than any other part of Wales. In the Welsh language, it has always been called “Mon man Cymru,” which means “Mona the Mother of Wales.” When crops have failed in all other regions, this island, from the richness of its soil and its abundant produce, has been able to supply all Wales.  

Gerald described the pastureland of mountains of Snowdonia with similar enthusiasm:

“They are thought to be so enormous and extend so far that, as the old saying goes: “Just as Anglesey can supply all the inhabitants of Wales with corn, so, if all the herds were gathered together, Snowdon could afford sufficient pasture.” 692 In the *Descriptio Kambriae*, Gerald compared the resources of the north and south of Wales:

The southern part of Wales, Cardiganshire and more especially Dyved, is particularly attractive because of its flat fields and long sea-coast. Gwynedd in the north is better defended by nature. The people who live there are more robust and the soil is richer and more fertile. If all the herds in Wales were driven together, the mountains of Snowdonia could supply them with pasture. In the same way Anglesey is so productive that it could supply the whole of Wales with

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corn over a long period. That is why Anglesey is called in Welsh “Mon mam Cymru,” which means the Mother of Wales.\textsuperscript{693}

To be fair, these observations must be balanced against what Gerald omitted to observe in the \textit{Itinerarium}. In \textit{The Governance of Gwynedd}, David Stephenson wrote:

Gerald tells us much about the lands through which he passed – though his silences are often as significant as his observations. For example, he notes some of the stone castles which were beginning to dot the terrain of Gwynedd, but he says nothing of the ordinary court buildings of the local rulers, even though he must have passed by some of them, as at Nefyn or Caernarfon. They were mainly wooden structures, and were evidently not considered by Gerald to be noteworthy. Again, we know that primitive trading boroughs existed in Gwynedd in the thirteenth century, and at Nefyn at least we find burgesses before 1200. But Gerald says nothing of any nascent boroughs: if any existed in 1188, they cannot have impressed him.\textsuperscript{694}

However, it should be remembered that Gerald based these descriptions of Gwynedd upon the preaching tour he made through the province in 1188; the \textit{Itinerarium} was completed no later than 1191 and the \textit{Descriptio} by 1194. Gerald cannot have begun the \textit{De Rebus a se Gestis} before 1208 – a full twenty years later. Over the intervening decades Llywelyn went from a princeling who had freshly reclaimed his inheritance to the undisputed master of Gwynedd and the premier ruler of the native Welsh. It is reasonable to suppose that over those same two decades, under the administration of one powerful prince, Gwynedd made similar strides.


\textsuperscript{694} Stephenson, p. xv.
In his writings, Gerald was as consistently affirmative about Llywelyn as he was about Gwynedd. Gerald first mentioned Llywelyn in the second version of the *Itinerarium Kambriae*, a revision which has been dated c. 1197. The passage is worth quoting at length as the context is important:

I shall pass over in silence what was done by Owain’s sons in our own days, when he himself was dead or dying. In their desperate attempts to gain the inheritance, they showed a complete disregard of brotherly ties. I have decided not to omit another event which happened in our own time and which I really must include. Owain ap Gruffydd, Prince of North Wales, had many sons, but only one of them was legitimate. This was Iorwerth Drwyndwn, which is the Welsh for flat-nosed. He in his turn had a legitimate son called Llywelyn. At the time of our journey through Wales this Llywelyn, who was then only about twelve years old, began to attack his two uncles, Dafydd and Rhodri, the sons of Owain by his first cousin Cristin. Although they shared between them as their inheritance the whole of Gwynedd except the land of Cynan, and although Dafydd was strongly supported by the English in that he had married the sister of King Henry II, by whom he had a son, in a few years Llywelyn drove them out of almost the whole of Gwynedd. They had their own wealth to draw on and the support of other rich men, but they were born in incest. Llywelyn was completely destitute of lands and money, but he was legitimate and he could therefore trust in the vengeance of God. He left them nothing but what, in his own magnanimity and on the advice of his good counselors, he chose to give them, for he pitied them still and felt some family responsibility for them. This shows how much those who commit adultery and incest are displeasing in the eyes of God.

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695 Please see *Journey*, p. 38; 276. See also Bartlett, p. 216.

696 *Journey*, pp. 193-4. “Illud autem, quod nostris hic diebus notabile censui, praetereundum non putavi. Oeneus filius Griphini, princeps Norwalliae, inter multos quos genuit filios tantum unum legitimum suscepit, scilicet lerverdum Troyndum, quod Kambrice simis sonat agnominatum: qui et filium similiter legitimum suscepit Luelinum. Hic in transitu nostro patruis suis David et Rotherico, quos de consobrina sua cui nomen Christiana. Oenus susceperat, quanquam puer tunc quasi duodennis, infestare coepit. Et licet totam Venedotiam, praeter terram Canani, inter se pro herili portione divisissent; licet etiam propter hoc David Anglicano fulciretur auxilio, puta qui sororem regis Henrici secundi sibi matrimonio copulaverat, ex qua et filium quoque susceperat; tamen intra paucos postmodum annos, de publico incestu natos, divitiis pariter et divitum auxilio fultos, legitimus iste, terris omnino carens et thesauris, a Venedotia fere tota, divina
Here Gerald presented Llywelyn not only as a formidable warrior (at age twelve!), but also as the sole legitimate possessor of Gwynedd and God’s instrument in enforcing the Divine strictures concerning marriage.\footnote{The charge of incest raises grotesque associations in the modern mind, but to Gerald this meant marriage within the broad degrees of kinship prohibited by the church.}

Gerald did not simply admire Llywelyn from afar. Over the course of the St. David’s controversy, 1199-1203, Gerald visited Llywelyn in Gwynedd twice and managed to attract the prince’s political, moral, and financial support to his cause. While Llywelyn is nowhere mentioned in the surviving chapters of the \textit{De Rebus a se Gestis}, some of the extant chapter headings for the missing chapters reflect this co-operation.\footnote{On the missing chapters of the \textit{De Rebus a se Gestis}, the complete list of chapter headings for the work, and the relationship between the three St. David’s works, please see Introduction, pp. 25-6.} These chapter headings also indicate that during those same years, Gerald had further bound himself to Llywelyn through his legal and oratorical support of one Rotoland, the sub-prior of the Welsh Cistercian house of Aberconwy, who claimed to be the bishop-elect of Bangor.

Rotoland had been elected bishop by the chapter of Bangor in 1190, but he did not attain consecration from Baldwin, archbishop of Canterbury, before the archbishop died.
in November. When Hubert Walter was consecrated archbishop of Canterbury three years later, he declined to consecrate Rotoland; instead, in April of 1195, Hubert imposed upon Bangor one Alan, a prior of the Hospitallers. When Alan died only a year later, the chapter of Bangor again elected Rotoland; again, Hubert Walter refused to consecrate him preferring, in March of 1197, to impose upon Bangor an Englishman, Robert of Shrewsbury.

Upon arriving in Rome in pursuit of his own appeal in the St. David’s controversy, Gerald met Rotoland. Their partnership did not begin immediately; during his first stay at Rome Gerald believed a rumor that the Elect of Bangor had died on a journey. Beginning with his second stay in Rome in March of 1201, however, Gerald co-operated closely with Rotoland. One of Gerald’s major orations at Rome was made at Rotoland’s prompting, another was made on his behalf. In July of 1201, Gerald made Rotoland his proctor at Rome should he ever be detained forcibly by King John.

Llywelyn ab Iorwerth was almost certainly underwriting Rotoland’s claim to the see of Bangor. It was the see closest to the geographic center of the prince of Gwynedd’s power. Llywelyn was the patron and chief benefactor of Aberconwy, the abbey from whence Rotoland had twice been called by the chapter of Bangor. According to Rhys

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700 Hays, p. 10.

701 “Similiter et dominus Bangorensis electus ante decessum suum…” *De Invect.*, p. 87.

702 Hays, p. 12; *De Invect.*, pp. 153-4.
Williams Hays, “…one can be sure that, without Llywelyn’s approval, the canons would not twice have elected Rotoland bishop. It seems probable too, that Llywelyn had subsidized, or helped to subsidize, Rotoland’s and his attendant’s trips to Rome.” A 1203 commission granted to Rotoland by the pope provides further indirect evidence that Llywelyn was supportive of the elect of Bangor’s case. In the manner typical for such commissions, the pope appointed two men to hear the depositions of each party’s witnesses, one sympathetic to each side. These men were the prior of Wenlock, a man known to be loyal to the archbishop of Canterbury, and Laurence, the prior of Bardsey, a man Gerald identified as an emissary of Llywelyn.

Gerald’s close cooperation with Llywelyn and his support for Rotoland, the Elect of Bangor, both link Gerald to Llywelyn in the pursuit of substantial, mutual political goals. This linkage is important to bear in mind because establishes Llywelyn as a likely source of patronage for Gerald in the years that followed. To establish that theirs was a co-operative effort, and not merely a coincidence of interests, requires a close examination of the evidence available in the three works Gerald wrote about the St. David’s controversy. Extracting the evidence of this cooperation from the Geraldine texts without succumbing to the danger of homogenizing the three St. David’s works requires a two-step process. I will first consider, in sequential order, each of the relevant extant chapter headings for the missing chapters of the De Rebus. Then, where it is

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704 Hays, pp. 16-17; see also, Giraldi Cambrensis Opera III, p. 197.
possible, I will expound upon these headings with material from either the *De Invectionibus*, the *De Iure et State Menevensis Ecclesie*, or both.\textsuperscript{705}

The first chapter heading from the *De Rebus* clearly linking Gerald to Gwynedd concerns Rotoland; it reads: “How, at the urging of the elect of Bangor, the archdeacon responded to Andrew.”\textsuperscript{706} Andrew was a proctor representing Hubert Walter at Rome. During Gerald’s second sojourn at Rome, Andrew had not only argued aggressively against the elections of both Rotoland and Gerald, he had also made insulting remarks about the Welsh. Rotoland urged Gerald to respond to Andrew. In the *De Iure et Statu Menevensis Ecclesie*, Gerald took the occasion of Andrew’s slander of the Welsh to introduce the Elect of Bangor into his narrative and to comment upon Rotoland’s case:

Now this elect was a Cistercian monk and Sub-Prior of the monastery of Aberconwy in Gwynedd, who said that he was the lawful Elect of Bangor and that Robert had been forced upon them by the Archbishop. Now the Archdeacon, 

\textsuperscript{705} It is impossible to know how closely material extant in the other two St. David’s works which seems to correspond to the chapter headings for the missing chapters of the *De Rebus a se Gestis* conforms to what Gerald had originally written in those missing chapters. Certainly Gerald’s peculiar third-person style of narrative is preserved in the sections of the *De Iure et Statu Menevensis Ecclesie* which correspond most closely to the missing chapters of the *De Rebus a se Gestis*. On the other hand, Gerald was a relentless reviser, so despite the fact that we know Gerald re-used material from the *De Rebus* in both the *De Iure et State Menevensis Ecclesie* and the *De Invectionibus*, we cannot assume that the account of any given event hinted at by the surviving chapter headings of the *De Rebus* matched verbatim the accounts that survive in the *De Iure et Statu Menevensis Ecclesie* or the *De Invectionibus*. It would be foolish, in a study of the *De Rebus*, not to consider all the evidence of that work, however fragmentary it may be; it would be equally foolish not to augment that partial evidence with material from the other two St. David’s works, even though we cannot know if that material was copied verbatim from the *De Rebus* or substantially reworked. Both steps are necessary.

\textsuperscript{706} Chapter lxvi: “Qualiter ad instantiam Bangorensis electi archidiaconus Andreeae respondit.” *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I*, p. 9.
both on his first visit to Rome and on this, finding this man at Rome, strove with
all his might to help him, both to bring odium on the Archbishop, whose action
the monk, like himself, was attacking, and because this man was a Welshman and
might help him in the suit concerning the standing of the Church of St. David…
this monk entreated the Archdeacon to reply some time to Andrew, who so often
in public audience inveighed with foul abuse against the Welsh…\textsuperscript{707}

Gerald included his oration in defense of the Welsh in the \textit{De Invectionibus}.\textsuperscript{708}

In late summer of 1201, Gerald departed Rome a second time for Wales; Rotoland
accompanied him.\textsuperscript{709} The two men were in Gwynedd by December. Apparently there
had been a falling out between Rotoland and Llywelyn; the heading for chapter lxxxvi
reads: “How the archdeacon, crossing into North Wales, reconciled the elect of Bangor
and restored (him) to honor.”\textsuperscript{710} Gerald did not record in the other St. David’s works how
Rotoland had become alienated from Llywelyn, nor how he had reconciled the two men.
However, his ability to stand between them and bring about a reconciliation indicates that
Gerald was already held in some esteem by Llywelyn.

\textsuperscript{707} Butler, pp. 208-209. “Hic autem electus monachus erat ordinis Cisterciensis et
subprior Monasterii de Aberconeu in Venedocia, dicens se legi
timum electum de Bangor,
et Robertum ab archiepiscopo superintrusum.  Hunc autem et prima vice qua Romae
fuuerat archidiaconus et hac secunda Romae inventum, tam in odium archiepiscopi, cuius
factum monachus etiam impugnabat, quam etiam quoniam ipse Walensis extiterat, et in
causa status et dignitatis Sancti Davidis ei pro posse assisteret, totis juvare viribus
intendebat.  Cum itaque monachus ille supplicasset archidiacono, quatinus Andreae, qui
toties in gentem Walensicam publicis convitiis turpiter invehebatur, quandoque

\textsuperscript{708} \textit{De Invect.}, pp. 93-99.

\textsuperscript{709} Hays, p. 12; \textit{Giraldi Cambrensis Opera III}, p. 195.

\textsuperscript{710} “Qualiter archidiaconus in Norwalliam transiens, electum Bangorensem reconciliavit
et honori restituit.” \textit{Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I}, p. 10.
Gerald’s efforts in Northern Wales during the winter of 1201-2 seem to have been intense. According to the chapter headings in the *De Rebus*, he delivered sermons at Anglesey (lxxxvii), Bangor (xc), and Aberconwy (xcii).\(^\text{711}\) Furthermore, he attracted the support, and even the admiration, of two native Welsh princes. The heading for chapter lxxxi of *the De Rebus* reads: “Of the honor done to Gerald in Venedocia.”\(^\text{712}\) It is hard to know what, exactly, this “honor” was. Gerald did not preserve the specifics of his time in northern Wales during the winter of 1201-2 anywhere but in the lost chapters of the *De Rebus a se Gestis*. In fact, Gerald referred readers of the *De Iure et Statu Menevensis Ecclesie* curious about these efforts in northern Wales to the *De Rebus*.\(^\text{713}\)

Perhaps the “honor done to Gerald in Venedocia” in the *De Rebus* chapter headings refers to two incidents Gerald did preserve, in another context, in both the *De Invectionibus* and in the *De Iure*. The chapter headings of the *De Rebus* record that, during the winter of 1201-2, Gerald traveled through not only Gwynedd, but also through...

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\(^{711}\) *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I*, p. 10.


\(^{713}\) Butler, p. 221. “Now as to the manner in which Giraldus went through Gwyneddd and Powys and was received by the Princes of those parts with the greatest honour and concerning the help which they freely and generously offered him, all these things are clearly set forth in the *De Gestis Giraldi*. “Post haec autem qualiter Giraldus in Venedociam et Powisiam transiens, a principibus partium illarum cum honore maximo susceptus fuit; et de auxilio sibi liberaliter et large promisso, liber *De Gestis Giraldi* manifeste declarat.” *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera III*, p. 196. The *De Gestis Giraldi* was how Gerald most often referred to the *De Rebus a se Gestis*. 
Therefore, the heading for chapter lxxxix could allude to two occasions preserved in both of the other St. David’s works wherein the native Welsh princes of both Gwynedd and Powys did Gerald the honor of praising him publicly before their courts.

Of Llywelyn, Gerald wrote:

Moreover, when on a certain feast day Llywelyn, Prince of Gwynedd, had called together all the magnates of his country and was holding a great court, there came forth at the end of the feast, one of those who are called Bards both in Welsh and Latin... Then proclaiming silence both with voice and hand he put the following question: “I ask whether it were better and more honourable for the Elect of Mynyw (for thus the Archdeacon was then called by all, though he called himself Archdeacon only) “never to have raised the question of the dignity of St. David that had slept for so long, though it were never given him to bring it to a happy conclusion, or rather thus to have entered upon this enterprise and to have failed of its achievement?” and when there was a long pause and all were mute save for a certain whispering among themselves, the Prince at length broke silence and gave this answer: “I will declare to you without prejudice what I think on this matter. I say that it were far better and far more glorious for the Elect to have vindicated the rights of St. David against such mighty adversaries and against all England, lest through silence overlong they should perish, even though victory might not be his. For as long as Wales shall stand, this man’s noble deed shall for all time be noised abroad with worthy praise and honour, whether in written chronicles or upon the lips of poets. For he who does all he can and leaves nought undone that honesty and valour may venture, even though perchance he fail of his desire, has none the less deserved worthy praise. For neither a skillful dicer nor yet a valiant knight may always win what his heart desires. Moreover, thanks to his labours, the rightful dignity of the Church of Mynyw, so obscure before, shall through all time henceforth shine forth more manifest.”

And universal favour and applause followed on the words of the Prince.  

714 De Rebus chapter headings indicate that over this same winter Gerald delivered sermons at the Cistercian houses of Strata Marcella (xcii) and Valle Crucis (xciii) in Powys. Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I, p. 10.

In the same chapter, Gerald recorded similar praise from Gwenwynwyn, the prince of Powys:

Also on a certain day about the same time Gwenwynwyn, Prince of Powys and Cyfeiliog, having summoned his nobles and the chief men of his country to sit with him in council, and mention being made of the labours of Giraldus, a common topic in those days both in Wales and England, the Prince himself thus spoke: “Many a time and oft does our Wales stir up great wars against England, but never has it waged one so great and grievous as that now fought in these our days by the Elect of Mynyw, who for the honor of Wales ceases not with long and pauseless efforts to vex and harass the King and the Archbishop and all the clergy and people of England. In truth, if our wars last through the summer, they return to peace in the winter season, and never continue more than a year at most, and often only half that time. But this man’s warfare has already endured without cease for five years and more.”

While Gerald was certainly present in Gwynedd and Powys the winter of 1201-2, the St. David’s controversy had not yet been raging for five years. This being the case, these elaborate commendations of Gerald’s undertakings may belong to a later period.

Regardless of when these remarks were made, however, they illustrate that Gerald felt that he had established fairly strong connections to the princes of Northern Wales, and to Llywelyn in particular.

While the chapter headings of the De Rebus offer only an outline of Gerald’s efforts through the winter of 1201-1202, it is possible to begin to understand the degree to which Gerald enjoyed the active support of the native Welsh princes – especially Llywelyn – by resorting to the De Iure et Statu Menevensis Ecclesie. In the De Iure, we learn that Gerald, upon leaving Northern Wales, went first to St. David’s. There, he found that much of the chapter that had originally elected him had now – on account of

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716 Butler, pp. 234-5.
either threats or blandishments from the archbishop of Canterbury—turned against him.

Gerald demanded that his fellow canons assist him before the judges appointed by the pope to hear the matter of the metropolitan status of St. David’s. Indeed, he attempted to stiffen their spines by invoking the threats and blandishments of the native Welsh elite:

The Princes of South Wales also, Maelgwyn and Rhys ap Rhys, by their letters and messengers counseled them to stand up firmly with Giraldeus their Archdeacon on behalf of the dignity of St. David, saying that if they failed so to do, they would regard them and all the chief men of their country as their enemies for ever. Likewise Llywelyn, Prince of North Wales, by his messenger Laurence, Prior of the Isle of Saints (Bardsey), an eloquent man whom he had appointed for the purpose, invited them to follow the same course, informing them also by letters patent that, if any of the Canons or clerks of the Church of Mynyw lost anything at the hand of the English by so doing, he pledged himself to restore it twofold out of his own purse, and if any were driven out into exile on his account, he would receive them with honour in his own country and would liberally entertain them.  

Such native Welsh support for Gerald did not escape the notice of men loyal to the archbishop of Canterbury. Gerald was certain that one of Hubert Walter’s creatures, the abbot of Whitland, was passing important information to his enemies. In the *De Iure*, he characterized the abbot as:

…an enemy in the house and at the hearth, infecting the Chapter, conducting the messengers of the Archbishop backwards and forwards, revealing the frailties of

717 Butler, 221-22; “Principes quoque Sudwalliae, Maligo et Resus filius Resi, nuncius suis qui praesentes errant et literis, quatinus cum archidiacono Giraldo firmiter starent pro dignitate Sancti David commonuerunt; alioquin ipsos cunctosque probos terrarum suarum viros capitales in perpetuum hostes haberent. Lewelinus quoque Norwalliae princeps ad idem ipsos per nuncium suum, virum eloquentem, Laurentium priorrem de Insula Sanctorum, ad hoc destinatum invitavit, literis etiam suis patentibus id ipsum monendo, si quis canonicorum aut clericorum ecclesiae quicquam ob hoc per Anglicos amiserit, in duplum ei se redditurum de suo; et expulsos ob hoc exilioque datos cum honore in terra sua recepturum, et abundanter exhibiturum, certa sponsione concessit.” *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera III*, p. 197.
the Church of Mynyw, and, worst of all, betraying the secrets of the Barons, who loved the Church and for this reason favored the Archdeacon, not only to the Archbishop, but to the King and the Justiciar as well.\textsuperscript{718}

Indeed on the other side of the March, Gerald’s co-operation with Llywelyn appeared close enough to expose him to accusations of treason. Gerald records that, in late December of 1201, he was denounced to Geoffrey fitz Peter, King John’s justiciar, by Robert, Rotoland’s rival for the see of Bangor:

The Justiciar, being at Shrewsbury a little after Christmas with the Barons of those parts, had received great complaints concerning Giraldus from Robert, Bishop of Bangor, and he said that Giraldus had favoured his adversary, who represented himself to the Welsh as being the Elect of Bangor, though he had not received the King’s assent, and that he had lately restored him to the custodianship of the See of which he had been deprived; he also asserted in public that he was in this matter and in all else, opposing the honour of the King, adding that he had just come to North Wales to ally Llywelyn and the Princes of Powys with the Princes of South Wales and to raise the whole of Wales against the King. And so the Justiciar, moved by these utterances of the Bishop, which being false should have been regarded as sacrilegious, caused the Archdeacon to be deprived of all the episcopal lands at Brecon…\textsuperscript{719}

\textsuperscript{718} Butler, pp. 223-24; “…quam nuncios archiepiscopi per Walliam ante retroque conducendo, et quod deterius omnium erat, infirma ecclesiae Menevensis atque secreta necnon et baronum patriae, qui ecclesiam eandem diligebant, et ob hoc archidiacono favebant, tam archiepiscopo quam regi et justiciario revelando, efficacem ad nocendum pestem tanquam domesticus hostis et familiaris se multipliciter exhibuit.” \textit{Giraldi Cambrensis Opera III}, pp. 198-9.

\textsuperscript{719} Butler, p. 225. “Justiciarius enim Angliae parum post Natale apud Slopesberiam cum baronibus partium illarum existens, magnam ibidem audivit querimoniam ab episcopo Bangorensi Roberto de Giraldi archidiacono, cum omnibus quos secum ad hoc inducere potuit. Ait enim ipsum adversarii sui, qui se gerebat electum per Walenses citra regis assensum, fautorum existere; eumque nuper in episcopatus custodia, qua destitutus fuerat, restituuisse; asserens etiam in publica audientia, quod non solum in hoc sed in omnibus quoque, quae regis honore, contingebant, se semper opponebat. Adjiciens etiam, quod ad hoc in Norwalliam nunc advenit, ut Lewelinum et Powisiae principes cum Sudwalliae principibus confoederaret, totamque simul Walliam contra regem excitaret. Talibus itaque verbis episcopi, quae quod vera non errant pro sacrilegis habenda fuerant,
We needn’t take very seriously Robert’s claim that Gerald was conspiring with the native Welsh princes to provoke a general uprising against the king. While Gerald could scarcely deny that he had convinced the pope to grant custody of the see of Bangor to Rotoland - indeed Gerald was severely punished for this by the king’s men - such meddling stops well short of stirring up a revolt. Furthermore, conditions were not ripe for a general uprising of the Welsh and Gerald, a man of considerable diplomatic experience, could not have failed to notice this. Llywelyn’s relations with King John during the winter of 1201-2 were not bad; during the previous July the two greatest men in the royal government, Hubert Walter and Geoffrey Fitz Peter, had smoothed over some tensions by meeting Llywelyn at his frontier and, in exchange for his oath of fealty to King John, confirming the prince in the possession of all the lands he had taken.\textsuperscript{720} Indeed, if Llywelyn posed a threat to anyone in 1202 it was to Gwenwynwyn, not King John; by summer of that same year Llywelyn’s intimates had to talk their prince out of invading Powys.\textsuperscript{721}

Initially, Geoffrey Fitz Peter took the charges Robert made against Gerald quite seriously and ordered stern measures. Before Gerald was able to speak to Geoffrey, the justiciar had not only ordered the archdeacon of Oxford (Walter Map) to seize Gerald’s Oxford possessions, he had also sent a letter to all the Cistercian abbeys in Wales:

\textit{commotus justiciarius de terris episcopalis apud Brechene archidiaconum destitui fecit…”} \textit{Giraldi Cambrensis Opera III}, p. 200.

\textsuperscript{720} Lloyd, p. 178.

\textsuperscript{721} Lloyd, p. 177.
warning them against giving Gerald any aid and dispatched a letter to Gerald himself in which he threatened to seize both his property and person.\textsuperscript{722} When, in February, Gerald finally caught up with the justiciar at Kent, he found that a messenger sent by Llywelyn to Geoffrey to had begun to smooth things over. The justiciar demanded that this messenger disclose to him what Gerald had been up to in Wales; the messenger told Geoffrey that Gerald “had done all he could to win the Prince and his Lords to obedience and fidelity to the King.”\textsuperscript{723} When Gerald finally had the opportunity to speak to Geoffrey in person, he “discoursed with him for a long time in private concerning the state of Wales.”\textsuperscript{724} During this conversation, Gerald felt his position comfortable enough to suggest to Geoffrey that the royal interest was being diminished by the archbishop of Canterbury because Hubert Walter, in his dual position as prelate and royal chancellor, was obstructing “the re-creation of a third Archbishopric in his realm.”\textsuperscript{725} While Geoffrey did not relent in his stern sanctions against Gerald, their interaction hardly sounds like a would-be rebel being brought to heel by an officer of the king.

Nevertheless, while Gerald may have escaped the most serious charge against him - that of engineering an uprising of the Welsh - the hostility of the Plantagenet government toward him scarcely slackened. As the legal proceedings that the Pope had

\textsuperscript{722} Giraldi Cambrensis Opera III, pp. 205-206.

\textsuperscript{723} Butler, p. 231. Giraldi Cambrensis Opera III, p. 206.

\textsuperscript{724} Butler, p. 232; “…vocatus a justiciario multis ibidem de statu Walliae verbis secretius est conventus.” Giraldi Cambrensis Opera III, p. 207.

commanded take place in England ground on, both the justiciar and the chancellor continued to attempt to sway the process by sending menacing writs against Gerald’s supporters and by interfering with his lawful administration of the vacant see of St. David’s. Under these trying circumstances, and on the eve of a hearing before the bishops of Worcester and Ely that was ultimately conducted at St. Albans, Gerald again repaired to Gwynedd for aid. The chapter heading for Book III chapter cxxxvi of the De Rebus a se Gestis reads: “How the archdeacon prepared himself against that day; but first, so not to lose it through sloth, he did not hesitate to go to Northern Wales.”

The headings for the following four chapters introduce Gerald’s correspondence with supporters, including his kinsmen and friends in Ireland, Llywelyn of Gwynedd, the “reginae Norwalliae” (presumably Llywelyn’s wife, Joan), and Madog, prince of Powys.

In the De Iure et Stat Menevensis Ecclesie, Gerald characterized this second visit to Northern Wales as a journey undertaken largely to collect financial support that had been promised to him, but never sent:

…since he was unable to get the money promised him in North Wales and Powys, though he often sent faithful messengers to that end (for the Archbishop infected even those parts and dissuaded them from fulfilling their promises by means of the Abbot of Whitland and other corrupters) Giraldus, making no delay, journeyed hastily through Elfael and Maeliénydd and Kerry and Cydewain on his way to Gwynedd, and penetrating the thick and shaggy forests of Powys and the land of Gwenwynwyn, he found the latter on an expedition against Llywelyn with whom he had been dwelling in peace. He received Giraldus with honor, but of all the Princes of Wales alone refused to give an aid to St. David in his own land, not

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726 “Qualiter archidiaconus contra diem illum se praeparavit; sed prius ne quid per pigritiam amitteret, in Venedociam ire non tardavit.” Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I, p. 12.

727 Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I, p. 13.
only out of jealously, because Llywelyn had been the first to promise aid, but also out of avarice, that he might appease the Archbishop and the English whom he had joined against Llywelyn. Wherefore the vengeance of heaven soon after followed; for he received such a hurt owing to his horse trampling on his foot, that he suffered from grievous lameness and weakness almost past cure. [Gerald] therefore entered Gwynedd on his way to Llywelyn, together with the Elect of Bangor who had met him, and conversed with the Prince at Aberconwy concerning the money which had been collected and deposited with the Elect. He welcomed the Archdeacon with joy and cheerfulness; for he was a generous and kindly man and, if he had contracted any taint from the contagion of his neighbours, as soon as he saw the face of his friend, he cast all traces thereof aside and ordered the money to be paid to him, amounting, over and above that which he got from Powys, to the sum of twenty pounds.728

According to Gerald, the hearing at St. Albans was a fiasco in which the witnesses against him all perjured themselves out of a fear of threats, the hope of money, or the

728 Butler, pp. 249-252. “…quoniam pecuniam in Norwallia et Powisia collectam et ei promissam per nuncios fideles saeptius missos habere non potuit, archiepiscopo partes etiam illas per abbatem Albae Domus et alios quosdam corruptores inficiente darique promissa dissuadente, nec ignavus nec deses, per Elevein et Melenith per Keri et Kedewein versus Venedociam iter incunctanter arripuit; penetransque Powisiam et terram Wenonwein sylvis hispidam et munitissimam, ipsum in expeditione contra Lewelinum, cui tunc concordatus fuerat, inventit; a quo et cum honore susceptus est. Solus hic tamen inter principes Walliae tam propter invidiam, quod Lewelinus hoc inchoaverat, quam etiam avaritiam, neconut Anglicos, quibus contra Lewelinum adhaerebat, et archiepiscopum in hoc placeret, auxilium in terra sua Sancto David facere recusavit. Unde et vindicta divinitus paulo post secuta, tantam in pede laesionem equo proprio calcante seu recalcitrante suscepit, ut claudicationem incurreret gravem et imbecilitatem vix curabilem. Venedociam igitur intrans archidiaconus et ad Lewelinum accedens, simul cum electo Bangorensi qui ei occurrerat, super pecunia collecta et penes electum reservata apud Aberconeun principem convenit. Ipse vero de adventu archidiaconi laetus et hilaris, ut erat vir liberalis et lenis, si quam rubiginem ex infectione contraxerat, statim ut vultum amici vidit, totam abjiciens, pecuniam archidiacono reddi jussit. Erat autem summa pecuniae collectae, praeter hoc quod a Powisensibus habuit, librarium quasi xx.” Giraldi Cambrensis Opera III, p. 226.
desire for personal advancement.\textsuperscript{729} Gerald proposed a compromise to the archbishop; upon receiving the archbishop’s rejection of his proposal, he set out a third time for Rome.

Whatever the merits of his case, over the course of his third appearance at Rome Gerald had to contend with the overwhelming opposition not only of the archbishop of Canterbury and the king of England, but also of his own chapter. At this, the nadir of Gerald’s fortunes, only the native Welsh princes continued to support his cause. The heading for Book III, chapter clxix of the \textit{De Rebus a se Gestis} introduces the letter to the pope in which seven native Welsh princes from the three chief native Welsh principates, Gwynedd, Powys, and Deheubarth, expressed their support for the metropolitan claims of St. David’s.\textsuperscript{730} The letter survives in the \textit{De Iure}, and Llywelyn’s name occurs in the first place among the princes supporting Gerald.\textsuperscript{731} The letter reiterated complaints Gerald had already made years earlier, in his first oration before the papal curia; it was most certainly drafted by him.\textsuperscript{732} The princes complained that the archbishop of Canterbury

\textsuperscript{729} \textit{Giraldi Cambrensis Opera III}, p. 233.

\textsuperscript{730} “Literae principum Walliae papae directae” \textit{Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I}, p. 15.

\textsuperscript{731} “Reverendissimo patri et domino Innocentio Dei gratia summo pontifici, Lewelinus filius Jovert princeps Norwalliae, Wenunwen et Madocus, principes Powisiae, Grifinus et Mailgo, Resus ac Mareducus filii Resi principes Sutwalliae, salutem et debitam per omnia subjectionem.” \textit{Giraldi Cambrensis Opera III}, p. 245.

\textsuperscript{732} Indeed the consensus among historians differs not at all from the judgment originally made in the nineteenth century by J. S. Brewer, the editor of volumes I and III of Gerald’s collected works, that “these Welsh princes had but a small hand in [the letter’s] composition.” \textit{Giraldi Cambrensis Opera III}, p. 245. See also Richter, \textit{Giraldus Cambrensis} p. 121; Bartlett, p. 55; Butler, p. 269.
imposed upon the Welsh churches foreign prelates who did not know the language or the customs of the people.733 These intrusions, they argued, were accomplished “through the violence of the king.”734 The princes affirmed that the election of Gerald to the see of St. David’s had been canonical and that same see ought to be restored to metropolitan status.735 Most importantly, the letter invoked the abuses, by the archbishops of Canterbury, of the spiritual authority of their office. In language reminiscent of the way Gerald had characterized Hubert Walter’s conduct in the Painscastle disaster, the Welsh princes complained, “…whenever the English arise against us and our land, straightaway the archbishops of Canterbury place all of our land under interdict and they cover us and our kin - we who fight only for our patrimony and to uphold our liberty – by name, under a general sentence of excommunication.”736 No plainer statement of the convergence of Llywelyn’s interests with Gerald’s can be imagined.

The remaining chapter headings of the De Rebus linking Gerald to Llywelyn do so indirectly, through Rotoland, the bishop-elect of Bangor. The heading for chapter clxiv

733 “morum patriae et linguæ nostræ prorsus ignaros, qui nec verbum Dei populo praedicare sciunt” Giraldi Cambrensis Opera III, p. 244.

734 “pre regiam violentiam” Giraldi Cambrensis Opera III, p. 244.

735 Giraldi Cambrensis Opera III, pp. 245-46.

736 “… quoties Anglici in terram nostram et nos insurgunt, statim archiepiscopi Cantuarienses totam terram nostram sub interdicto concludunt; et nos, qui pro patria nostra solum et libertate tuenda pugnamus, nominatim, et gentem nostram in genere sententia excommunicationis involvunt…” Giraldi Cambrensis Opera III, p. 245.
introduced, “The indulgence granted by the lord pope to the elect of Bangor.” A few chapters later, Gerald recorded “How coming to the curia, having been received by the pope with a kiss and with honor, he caused the elect of Bangor to be received also with a kiss.” In chapter clxxviii, Gerald included his “Oration on behalf of the elect of Bangor.” The final chapter heading to mention the elect of Bangor recorded his misfortune: “Of the robbery of the elect of Bangor, and of the archdeacon, consoled through the vision of a boy.”

Again, we can turn to the *De Invectionibus* and the *De Iure et Statu Menevensis Ecclesie* to fill in some of the details. Just as the archbishop of Canterbury had alienated Gerald from the canons of St. David’s, so also had he managed to estrange Rotoland from the Cistercian order. In Gerald’s last long oration before the Pope, he included Rotoland in his list of those who had felt the “iniquity” of the archbishop: “The Elect of Bangor also felt it, for after his canonical election and the interposition of his appeal, [the archbishop] thrust an Englishman into his place and, that this might be effective, caused

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737 “Indulgentia domini papae Bangorum electo concessa.” *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I*, p. 14. What the nature of this indulgence was is not known; it does not survive. Rhys Williams Hays, p. 14.

738 Chapter clxvii. “Qualiter ad curiam venines a papa in osculo et cum honore suscepsus, Bangorensem electum quoque in osculo suscipi fecit.” *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I*, p. 15.

739 “Pro Bangorensi electo Giraldi oratio.” *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I*, p. 15.


741 The letters patent from the Cistercian general chapter punishing Rotoland for being a gyrovague monk are the only documents that preserve the name “Rotoland;” Gerald referred to him only as “R.,” or “Elect of Bangor.” Rhys Williams Hays, pp. 13-14.
him to be expelled from his order by the Abbots of England and the chapter of Citeaux.”

Rotoland’s status vis a vis his order created an awkward situation when he accompanied Gerald into the pope’s presence in January of 1203. Gerald did his best to help Rotoland save face:

Now the Elect of Bangor by reason of the sentence whereby he had been cast out from his order, of which sentence the Abbot of Cîteaux had informed the Lord Pope, did not venture to enter the city forthwith, but had resolved to lie hid not far from the city or rather in its suburbs, until the Archdeacon had first sounded the mind of the Pope; but the Archdeacon, though it was with difficulty that he succeeded in inspiring him with courage and confidence, took him along with him to the Court. Now the Pope, as was his wont, welcomed the Archdeacon honourably and with a kiss, but to the Elect of Bangor he said, “Brother, I am told that you have been excommunicated.” Whereat the Archdeacon interposed, “My lord, if it please you, no credence should be given to the works of adversaries till both sides have been heard and the truth is known.” And forthwith the Pope greeted him also with a kiss, saying, “Such is their assertion, but do you see to it.” For his adversaries had been before him and had defamed him thus by means of letters form the Abbot of Cîteaux testifying to that fact.

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743 Butler, pp. 266-7. “Electus autem Bangoriensis propter sententiam, qua separatus ab ordine fuerat, quoniam id abbas Cisterciensis domino papae literis et nunciis significaverat, non statim urbem intrare, sed non procul ab urbe vel etiam in ipso suburbio, quonque per archidiaconm animum domini papae erga ipsum praetemptasset, latitare disposuerat, donec archidiaconus ei vix animum adjiciens et audaciam, secum eundem ad curiam duxit. Archidiaconum autem statim papa more solito cum honore et osculo suscepit. Bangoriensi vero dixit: “Frater, dicitur quod excommunicatus sis.” Cui archidiaconus: “Domine, verbis adversariorum nisi parte utraque prius audita et veritate cognita, fides, si placet, adhiberi non debet.” Et statim ipsum quoque palam in osculo suscepit, dicens: “Ita dicunt et asserunt; vos videritis.” Giraldi Cambrensis Opera III, p. 241. According to Gerald, this was not the only time he brought the Elect of Bangor along when invited into the pope’s presence. Hays, p. 16; Giraldi Cambrensis Opera III, pp. 241-2; 250; 253.
The “Oration on behalf of the Elect of Bangor” alluded to in the chapter headings of the *De Rebus* was delivered in March of 1203; it is preserved in the *De Invectionibus.*

When the last chapter heading concerning Rotoland in the *De Rebus* - which reports that he was robbed on his way out of Rome - is compared to what Gerald wrote concerning the Elect of Bangor in the *De Iure et Statu Menevensis Ecclesie*, we are again reminded that Gerald’s assistance to Rotoland was motivated entirely by political considerations. They were not friends. On Gerald’s third journey to Rome, after he had managed to slip across the channel to France, he had met up with Rotoland and the two traveled together. At Faenza, in December of 1202, Gerald ran out of money; Rotoland refused him a loan, and Gerald was forced to borrow from the usurious local merchants. Upon their arrival at Rome, Rotoland compounded the insult by declining to lodge with Gerald, a slight Gerald attributed to Rotoland’s fear that, were they to stay in the same accommodations, he might have help Gerald financially. When, upon departing Rome just after Easter in 1203, Rotoland was robbed of his papers and his money and forced to return, Gerald’s reaction was not exactly charitable:

Moreover, that monk, who claimed to be the Elect of Bangor, had meanwhile completed his business as best he could, and had gone off with a Commission granted him by the Pope, But although he was wealthy and had been so strongly supported and helped by the Archdeacon, he had no regard for him now, but left him in the Court afflicted with anxieties and in sore straits with none to help him. Thus he found that man like almost all the clergy of Wales, for he used to say that

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744 Hays, p. 17; “Pro Bangoriensi Electo” *De Invectionibus*, pp. 118-120; *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera III*, p. 266.

among the laity he found much good faith, but among the clergy in whose cause he was fighting, he found none. But God oft takes vengeance in respect of things for which men take none, and even as he sometimes rewards virtuous action in his own good time, so likewise he brings retribution upon the wicked even while still they live. Thus it came to pass that this monk, entering a wood incautiously and alone, fell among thieves and was robbed not only of his money whereof he carried no small sum (as he afterwards himself confessed), but also of his letters and all his goods; and so within two days he returned to the Court and entering the lodgings of the Archdeacon he told him of the misfortune that had befallen him, saying that it was no more than he deserved because he had refused a loan to a good friend and comrade and also to St. David the patron of Wales; and therefore divine vengeance had by the hands of robbers taken from him all that he possessed.  

Even if the passages Gerald included in the De Iure et Statu Menevensis Ecclesie disparaging Rotoland were copied verbatim from the earlier De Rebus a se Gestis, and they very well may have been, Gerald did not have to worry much about their offending Llywelyn. Gerald, in the same passage, had praised the lay powers of Wales at the expense of the Welsh clergy. Indeed Llywelyn may have shared Gerald’s view of Rotoland – recall that, in 1201, Gerald had to reconcile the two men. It was the Elect of

Butler, pp. 308-309. “Praeterea monachus ille, qui se Bangoriensem gessit electum, interim peractis negotiis ut tune poterant, cum comissione discesserat; et cum pecuniosus esset, licet ab archidiacono suffultus in tantum est et adjutus, ipsum tamen in curia relictum curis afflictum et angustiis in juvamine nullo respexerat. Talem ergo, qualem totum propemodum Walliae clerum, sibi reperit istum. In laicis enim, ut dicere consueverat ipse, fidem invenit plurimam; in clericis vero, quorum preaecipue negotia gerebat, fere nullam. Porro quia plerumque ea quae non vindicat homo, vindicat Deus; et sicut interdum opera bona retribuit etiam in tempore, sic et mails quandoque vices etiam in vita reddere solet; monachus ille minus discrete absque comitatu silvam penetrans, incidit in latrones; et tam pecunia sua, quam reportabat non modicam, sicut ipsem et postea confessus est, quam literis suis et rebus omnibus spoliatus, infra biduum ad curiam reversus est; et intrans hospitium archidiaconi, fortunam suam exposuit et infortunium totum; assenerens istud sibi non praeter meritum accidisse quia quod socio et amico bono Sanctoque Davidi Walliae patrono mutuare noluit, hoc ultio divina totum sibi per vespilliones ademit. Giraldi Cambrensis Opera III, pp. 277-288.
Bangor’s cause –resisting Canterbury - that counted. At any rate by 1204, no doubt informed by Gerald’s failure in the St David’s controversy in the preceding year, the prince of Gwynedd had given up on Rotoland for good and began cooperating fully with Bishop Robert of Shrewsbury, the man imposed upon Bangor by Hubert Walter. Indeed Bishop Robert and Llywelyn seem to have developed a good working relationship. Llywelyn probably reconciled with Bishop Robert to smooth the way for his 1205 marriage to Kin John’s natural daughter Joan. However, when King John invaded Gwynedd years later, in 1212, Bishop Robert courageously refused to meet the excommunicated king. He was given rough treatment at the hands of John’s mercenaries, despite having taken refuge at the high altar of Bangor cathedral, and John further punished him with a heavy fine.

Llywelyn ab Iorwerth and the Wechelen Story

Gerald’s literary productions furnish ample evidence of his admiration for and cooperation with Llywelyn ab Iorwerth. This evidence does definitively connect Gerald to Llywelyn, but it does not, by itself, prove that Gerald composed the De Rebus a se Gestis for the prince. While the De Rebus has no dedicatory preface explicitly identifying a prospective patron, it does contain important internal evidence that Gerald meant the work for Llywelyn - the esoteric layer of Wechelen story. A brief reconsideration of the

747 Hays, p. 19 n. 29.
748 Lloyd, p. 191.
message of the Wechelen story, considered alongside evidence from the *Chronicle of the Abbey of S. Werburg at Chester*, successfully eliminates every potential patron in England and Wales except for Llywelyn.

The entire point of the third section of the Wechelen story is that the anchorite of Llowes was the *victim of an untrue rumor*. This rumor, in circulation among the Welsh, held that Wechelen had encouraged the English to attack the Welsh force besieging Painscastle. Gerald emphasized, through repetition, the importance of the false rumor about Wechelen. He wrote that he had come to see his friend Wechelen in Elfael at the time when the rumor was in broad circulation: “when word had spread throughout the entire province” *cum autem divulgatum esset verbum istud per totam provinciam illam.* In the next sentence, Gerald claimed that Wechelen was “was greatly pained that such talk should be spread around concerning himself” *Et quia multum dolebat tale verbum de ipso disseminatum fuisse.* Furthermore, Wechelen claimed that while “the Devil” was motivated to involve himself in the Painscastle slaughter out of a desire for a “great profit in souls,” the “angel of Satan” was motivated by the opportunity to “defame him [Wechelen] as the author and instigator of the slaughter.” The Wechelen story is, at heart, a sad tale of defamation.

Wechelen is, of course, an authorial double of Gerald; the rumor that Wechelen had encouraged the English to attack the Welsh force outside Painscastle is a rumor that Gerald had done so. In Chapter Four, I reviewed Gerald’s vulnerability to such a rumor.

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749 *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I*, p. 91.

750 *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I*, p. 92.
While it is impossible to prove whether or not Gerald had urged his old colleagues in the Plantagenet curia to aggressive action against the native Welsh in 1198, there is no question that he could have. This fact alone eliminates as the intended recipients of the *De Rebus a se Gestis* any member of the Plantagenet curia and any of the curial prelates Gerald knew from his old days in the service of Henry II and Richard I. First of all, most of Gerald’s old curial circle would already have known whether Gerald did or did not, in 1198, advise his former masters to attack the Welsh. Secondly, why should any of these men have cared if Gerald had provided sanguinary counsel to Geoffrey Fitz Peter and Hubert Walter? The English won the battle, after all. If anything, in light of the result Plantagenet loyalists would have regarded such advice as redounding to Gerald’s credit. Furthermore, the slaughter at Painscastle, while a major setback for the native Welsh, was not that important a victory to the English. King Richard did not bother to return from the Continent to see to it. His instincts were obviously correct: the justiciar managed, without any royal help, to suppress a general uprising of the Welsh in one day.

Nor can the *De Rebus* have been meant for any of the great Marcher lords. True, Robert Bartlett justifiably characterized Gerald as the “spokesman for the marchers… their eulogist and apologist.”\(^{751}\) Certainly Gerald’s heroic portrayal of his own kinsmen in *Expugnatio Hibernica* both confirms this observation and suggests that the lords of the Welsh march may have understood themselves as being not only the king’s men, but also in some way Welsh and therefore set apart from the other magnates and castellans of the

\(^{751}\) Bartlett, p. 20.
“Angevin Empire.” The marcher identity in Wales was no doubt real and distinct, but by the time Gerald wrote the De Rebus, his family had found greater prosperity in Ireland than they had ever enjoyed in Wales. Upon capitulating in the St. David’s controversy, Gerald repaired to the court of Meiler fitz Henry, who was serving as justiciar of Ireland.

After 1208, when Meiler, the most prominent of Gerald’s kinsmen, was removed from office, to which great lord of the Welsh march could Gerald have resorted? Surely not William the Marshall. While after 1189 William had become the husband of the heiress of Striguil and thus lord of some of the richest lands in Wales (as well as substantial holdings in Ireland), he would not have made a suitable patron for Gerald. One of Meiler’s chief tasks as justiciar of Ireland had been the ceaseless harassment of the Marshall because the old soldier had fallen out of favor with King John. The very important de Braose family counted Brecon, where Gerald had once been archdeacon, among their holdings. In the second revision of the Itinerarium Kambriae, both William and Matilda de Braose had been the objects of the archdeacon’s flattery. However, the de Braose family was brutally humbled by King John between 1208-1210; by 1211, both Matilda and William were dead. Ranulf, Earl of Chester (1172-1232) was a major landholder on the march and very rich, but Gerald never expressed much interest in him.

753 Bartlett, p. 20.
755 Giraldi Cambrensis Opera VI, pp. 22-23.
The Earl had a reputation for being parsimonious, not a quality one seeks out in a patron; furthermore, he would hardly have been sorry to see an uprising of the native Welsh crushed.\footnote{James W. Alexander referred to him as a “pinchpenny patron.” James W. Alexander, \textit{Ranulf of Chester: A Relic of the Conquest} (Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press: 1983), p. 39.}

The esoteric layer of the Wechelen story must, therefore, have been meant for some important personage among the native Welsh elite. Furthermore, it would have had to have been the lay elite; the Welsh prelacy could not have offered any fit patron for Gerald. No Welsh episcopal see was sufficiently wealthy for Gerald to have resorted to a Welsh bishop for patronage. Indeed the richest bishopric in Wales was St. David’s, but Gerald constantly complained about its poverty during his legal appeals to Rome. At any rate, by 1208 Gerald had long been alienated from the chapter and the bishop of his home see. Of the regular clergy in Wales, only the Cistercians were wealthy enough to offer the kind of patronage Gerald would have expected. The idea that Gerald - after 1203 - would have inscribed any work of his to a Cistercian abbot is too ludicrous to contemplate.

This leaves the native Welsh aristocracy. The most important principates were those of Deheubarth in the South, Powys in the eastern central portion of Wales, and Gwynedd in the north. In theory, the esoteric layer of the Wechelen story could have been intended for the princes of any of these three territories; the elite of all three were adversely effected by the Painscastle disaster. True, Gwenwynwyn of Powys was the leader of the Welsh uprising crushed outside Painscastle in 1198, but according to native
Welsh *Chronica de Wallia*, he had “amassed a grand army” that had enjoyed “the support of all the forces of all the princes of Wales.” This being the case, we must evaluate the suitability of the elite of Deheubarth, Powys, and Gwynedd between 1208 and 1216.

In a sense, the greeting of the letter the Welsh princes sent to Pope Innocent III c. 1203 tells us most of what we need to know. The pope, “Most Reverend father and lord of God highest pontiff” is hailed by, “Llywelyn ab Iorwerth, prince of North Wales, Gwenwynwyn and Madog, princes of Powys, Gruffydd and Maelgwyn, Rhys and Maredog, sons of Rhys prince of South Wales.” The greeting honors Llywelyn by placing his name first. More importantly, it suggests that only one Welsh principate, Gwynedd, enjoyed the undivided rule of a solitary prince.

As potential patrons for Gerald, the princes of Deheubarth can be eliminated first. While these men were Gerald’s cousins, the death of the Lord Rhys in 1197 had thrown his princely house into disorder. His designated and only legitimate heir, Gruffydd ap Rhys (d. 1201) was weak, and often bested by his determined (illegitimate) brother Maelgwyn. So intense was the hatred between the half-brothers that at one point, c. 1199, Maelgwyn surrendered the all-important fortification at Cardigan to the English in exchange for King John’s recognition of his territorial claims. This scandalized the

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758 “Reverendissimo patri et domino Innocentio Dei gratia summo pontifici, Lewelinus filius Jovert princeps Norwalliae, Wenunwen et Madocus, principes Powisiae, Grifinus et Mailgo, Resus ac Mareducus filii Resi principes Sutwalliae, salutem et debitam per omnia subjectionem.” *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera III*, p. 245.

759 Davies, p. 226.
native Welsh chronicler who composed the *Brut*; his entry for 1200 reads: “That year Maelgwyn ap Rhys sold Cardigan, the key to all Wales, for a small price to the Saxons for fear and in hatred of Gruffudd, his brother.”\(^76^0\) Maelgwyn had supported Gerald during the St. David’s controversy; he signed the 1202 letter of the princes to Pope Innocent III. However, Maelgwyn made a bad choice in 1208, when he took the side of Gwenwynwyn against Llywelyn. Maelgwyn ultimately backed Llywelyn against John, but at Aberdovey in 1216, when the prince of Gwynedd partitioned southern Welsh lands, he was noticeably parsimonious toward Maelgwyn.\(^76^1\)

Rhys and Owain, the grandsons of the Lord Rhys by his legitimate son Gruffydd, attempted to remedy their weakness by seeking the support, alternately, of Llywelyn and of King John. They managed to be on the losing side in 1211 and 1212; they were never to enjoy anything like the power and influence of their grandfather, even in their home territories of Deheubarth.\(^76^2\) These men could offer Gerald nothing.

Upon the death of the Lord Rhys of Deheubarth in 1197, Gwenwynwyn of Powys had appeared to be the man to take his place as the pre-eminent leader of *Pura Wallia*. Gwenwynwyn’s uprising of 1196-8 had attracted widespread support and enjoyed early success. More importantly, the August 13, 1198 defeat at Painscastle was the worst military calamity of Gwenwynwyn’s career.\(^76^3\) Could Gerald have intended the esoteric

\(^{76^0}\) *Brut*, p. 183.

\(^{76^1}\) Lloyd, p. 199.

\(^{76^2}\) Lloyd, p. 194.

\(^{76^3}\) Of the aftermath of Painscastle, J. E. Lloyd wrote: “…the Prince of Powys saw the prize for which he had fought, the leadership of the Welsh people, pass beyond
layer of the Wechelen story for Gwenwynwyn? Probably not. Gwenwynwyn was so irrevocably diminished by the Painscastle defeat that, after 1198, his status among the native Welsh never recovered. He would not have made much of a patron. When John ignored Llywelyn’s raid into Powys in 1208, his refusal to punish Llywelyn underscored the second-place status of Gwenwynwyn that Gerald had observed years earlier, in 1203. While Gwenwynwyn was not toppled from preeminence within Powys, in Wales as a whole he was overshadowed by Llywelyn and often had to resort to an alliance with King John to maintain his position.764

Furthermore, it is fair to say that Gerald did not have much use for the Prince of Powys. True, Gwenwynwyn was among the signatories of the letter of the Welsh princes to the pope in support of Gerald’s position in the St. David’s controversy.765 True also, Gerald proudly recorded Gwenwynwyn’s praise of his efforts to obtain metropolitan status for St. David’s.766 However, in the De Iure et Statu Menevensis Ecclesie Gerald wrote disparagingly of Gwenwynwyn, complaining that when he most needed financial support, Gwenwynwyn failed him but Llywelyn did not. Gerald took ghoulish delight in the prince’s serious in jury in a horse riding accident, interpreting it as God’s judgment on Gwenwynwyn for failing to aid the cause of St. David.767

764 Lloyd, pp. 179-182; 199-200.
765 Giraldi Cambrensis Opera III, p. 245.
766 Giraldi Cambrensis Opera III, pp. 210; De Invect., p.185.
767 Giraldi Cambrensis Opera III, p. 226.
Of all the native Welsh princes, this leaves only Llywelyn ab Iorwerth of Gwynedd. He was without a doubt pre-eminent among the native Welsh elite during the period in which Gerald is thought to have written the *De Rebus a se Gestis*. Gwynedd did not suffer from divided rule as did Deheubarth after 1197. Llywelyn had not been humbled in 1211, despite King John’s best efforts, in the way Gwenwynwyn had been in 1198 and 1208. I demonstrated above that Llywelyn commanded resources that were, at least for a Welsh prince, substantial. Not only did Gerald know Llywelyn, he admired him and consistently affirmed him in his writings.

Most importantly, the esoteric layer of the Wechelen story would most certainly have concerned the prince of Gwynedd. Any rumor that Gerald had encouraged the English attack upon the Welsh at Painscastle could have been fatal to his relationship with Llywelyn. While the military defeat at Painscastle was devastating to Gwenwynwyn, it was also the first substantial military setback of young Llywelyn’s career. Furthermore, the collapse of the Welsh uprising that followed the Painscastle disaster inflicted still further damage on Llywelyn’s interests. The *Chronicle of the Abbey of St. Werburg at Chester*, a foundation just across the march from Gwynedd, recorded the impact that the Painscastle defeat had in northern Wales:

> A great number of Welshmen, amounting in the whole as they say to four thousand, were slain by the French at Powis castle [Painscastle]. Many of the nobles of the whole of North Wales were killed, and especially the men of Llywelyn were killed and altogether dispersed, and the castle of Mold was besieged and captured from Llywelyn on the day of the Epiphany of Our Lord.768

Chapter 6 - Conclusion

Gerald of Wales concealed a message in the *De Rebus a se Gestis* intended for the few capable of performing the esoteric reading of the Wechelen story. This is not a theory, or one private interpretation, but an historical fact supported by the best evidence. Furthermore, the message of the esoteric layer of the Wechelen story – that Gerald had no part in encouraging the devastating English attack on the Welsh at Painscastle – is not peripheral, but central to his purpose in composing the work. Gerald wrote the *De Rebus a se Gestis* not merely to preserve the events of his past, but to construct a usable narrative of his life by which he might ingratiate himself with the native Welsh elite of Gwynedd. The esoteric message of the Wechelen story is itself the best, albeit not the only, evidence that Gerald intended the *De Rebus* for a Welsh readership - and for the court of Llywelyn ab Iorwerth in particular. These two facts have important implications for how we ought to understand the *De Rebus a se Gestis* itself, and its author. Furthermore, it is not insignificant that a man well-integrated into the core of high medieval Europe would compose such a work for a prince on the Celtic periphery.

In light of the evidence I have presented, previous interpretations of the *De Rebus a se Gestis* must be amended. However eloquent and accurate his translation of the *De Rebus*, H. E. Butler was simply wrong when he characterized Gerald’s “self revelation”
in the work as “frank.”\textsuperscript{769} Butler’s contention that “there is little reason to suppose that it falls markedly below the level of autobiographical veracity” betrays the assumption that if Gerald did not overtly fabricate the content of the \textit{De Rebus}, then the work must be artless, or at least forthright. Michael Richter failed to appreciate the true purpose of the \textit{De Rebus a se Gestis} because he attempted to define it in relation to the other two St. David’s works: “If one would classify the three books, they could justly be called the chronological (\textit{De Rebus}), systematic (\textit{De Invectionibus}) and psychological (\textit{De Iure}) treatment of his election dispute.”\textsuperscript{770} The narrative of his own life that Gerald constructed for the \textit{De Rebus} is far too revisionist to be a mere “chronological” account; he wrote the work not to preserve a series of events, but to create for himself a useable past. Robert Bartlett correctly characterized the narrative of the \textit{De Rebus} as “teleological”; Gerald did indeed recall the events of his own life in such a manner as to make his 1199 election seem to be the natural culmination of his career.\textsuperscript{771} However, Bartlett’s interpretation of the \textit{De Rebus} is also incomplete because it implies that Gerald composed the \textit{De Rebus a se Gestis} for only one purpose: to tell the story of the St. David’s controversy. It does not allow for the fact that the “teleological” narrative arc of the work might be in some way distinct from the author’s practical purposes in writing it.

We are on surer ground if we reinterpret much of the material in the \textit{De Rebus a se Gestis} in light of Gerald’s unfortunate circumstances c. 1208-1216 and in light of the

\textsuperscript{769} Butler, p. 24.


\textsuperscript{771} Bartlett, p. 47.
political interests of the man Gerald intended to read it: Llywelyn ab Iorwerth. I would suggest – and I have much work to do to further develop this argument – that the most critical passages in the surviving chapters of the *De Rebus* ought to be understood as set-pieces designed to exhibit Gerald’s intimacy with the native Welsh or his sympathy with the interests of their elite. Let us conclude by interpreting three such passages in light of the interests of the prince of Gwynedd. Each of these passages features the future King John – who was Llywelyn’s father-in-law, but who was also, after 1211, the prince of Gwynedd’s chief military adversary. In the *De Rebus a se Gestis*, Gerald used John, once his curial master, as a foil to demonstrate his own Welsh sympathies. That Gerald turned these incidents to his own narrative purposes does not necessarily suggest that they did not happen – that would be impossible to prove. However, I think it well to approach each of these anecdotes bearing in mind Monika Otter’s wise dictum, “The mere fact that something is true can never explain why it is being said.”

Gerald’s vainglorious account of his 1188 preaching tour through Wales can be found in chapters xxvii-xxx of Book II. In chapter xxviii, Gerald claimed to have been so successful in recruiting men to the proposed crusade that John, who held the Earldom of Pembroke, “…assailed him with bitter words in the presence of many, because by his preaching he had emptied his land of all the strength of men that was his defence against the Welsh; and that he had done this, not so much that he might succour the land of Jerusalem as that he might destroy the Earl’s land, in order that when he had emptied it of

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its men he might hand it over to his kinsmen the Welsh.” Gerald did not exactly deny this: “.. the Archdeacon briefly replied that God, who searches out the hearts and intentions of all men, knew his purpose in so doing, wherefore let God judge between them.” In the very next chapter Gerald subtly insulted John by placing a parallel expression of suspicion - albeit from the Welsh perspective - into the mouth of the Lord Rhys’s fool, John Spang: “Oh Rhys, you ought greatly to love this kinsman of yours, the Archdeacon; for today he has sent a hundred of your men or more to serve Christ; and if he had spoken in Welsh, I do not think that a single man would have been left you out of all this multitude.” Gerald made no mention of either incident in his 1191 work devoted to the preaching tour, the *Itinerarium Kambriae*.

The counsel that Gerald claimed he had given to John during King Richard’s absence should also be interpreted as both a subtle insult to John and an expression of Gerald’s solidarity with the Welsh. In Book II chapter xxiii, Gerald claimed he had told John, who had refused to absent himself from England while his brother was on crusade:

..it better became his honour and reputation that he should be away during his brother’s absence rather than present, and urged him that, when almost all other princes had gone forth on the expedition to Jerusalem, he alone should not abide at home in seeming sloth and idleness, but that he should rather go to Ireland, and wholly subdue it and build castles there…

While still a teenager, John had been made *Dominus Hiberniae*, lord of Ireland, by his father. Through his marriage to Isabella of Gloucester, however, John was also master of

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773 Butler, p. 101; *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I*, p. 76.
774 Butler, p. 102; *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I*, p. 77.
775 Butler, p. 118; *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I*, p. 86.
Glamorgan and Newport, two substantial lordships on the Welsh March. There were plenty of unconquered Celtic lands bordering both John’s Irish and Welsh holdings; it is not insignificant that Gerald claimed to have encouraged John to go make his name by conquering land in Ireland – not in Wales.

Finally, it is worth revisiting Gerald’s oft-repeated claim to have declined episcopal sees which had been offered to him at the hands of Plantagenet princes or their curial servants. In Book II chapter xiii, he claimed to have declined John’s offer of two vacant Irish sees, Wexford and Leighlin. According to Gerald, he would have accepted John’s offer, “if he saw that the Earl’s intent was to exalt and upraise the Church in Ireland… But since the Earl’s heart was not set on this, he preferred rather to remain a private person than to be placed in power where he could do no good.” Gerald claimed, in Book II chapter xxii, to have declined William Longchamp’s offer of the see of Bangor: “…Gwion, the bishop of Bangor, having died, that Bishopric was offered him by the Justiciar, then Legate of the Apostolic See; but the Archdeacon utterly refused it.” Finally, Gerald claimed that John, after having helped the magnates of England expel the hated William Longchamp, had offered him the Welsh see of Llandaff:

But in process of time, when [Longchamps] had been deposed by the Earl and cast out of England, and the Earl himself held, as it were, the position of Viceroy, he offered the Archdeacon the Bishopric of Llandaff, whose Cathedral Church with the greater part of the diocese was in his lands of Glamorgan; but he refused with the same constancy that was his wont. Therefore besides the Church of St. David, to which he had been nominated and especially called in his youth, four Bishoprics had now been offered him, two in Ireland and two in Wales; yet all

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776 Butler, p. 90; Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I, p. 65.

777 Butler, p. 117; Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I, p. 85.
these offers he trod underfoot with a lofty and untroubled mind, since he coveted no such thing.\footnote{778}{Butler, pp. 121-122; \textit{Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I}, p. 87.}

Should we believe that Gerald, who complained incessantly about his unrewarded service to the Plantagenets, had declined from their hands four episcopal sees? The claim is impossible to prove or disprove. Gerald’s extremely poor political judgment may give us reason to doubt that any responsible party from the Plantagenet ruling elite would have offered him a bishopric. After all, he had a record of offending and alienating the most important men at court.\footnote{779}{Please see Chapter One, pp. 87-89.} On the other hand, Robert Bartlett has described Gerald as one of John’s \textit{familiares}.\footnote{780}{Bartlett, p. 65.} Certainly, the two men worked closely together during young John’s first expedition to Ireland in 1185. Gerald might very well have struck John as the sort of capable cleric with local knowledge who ought to be given a bishopric in Ireland – and since the young John certainly struck Gerald as an impossible and irresponsible master, Gerald might well have refused such an offer. Likewise, before Gerald burned his bridges with Longchamp by excoriating him in the \textit{Vita Galfridi Archiepiscopi Eboracensis}, he had worked under his supervision in the curia of the absent King Richard. Perhaps the justiciar thought Bangor a fit reward for this curial servant. Certainly it is not improbable that John, in Richard’s absence, might have offered Gerald Llandaff. The see lay largely within John’s own demesne and he could easily have bullied the chapter into accepting whomever he chose as their bishop.
In interpreting the *De Rebus a se Gestis*, we might more fruitfully ask how Gerald’s claim to have declined these four sees would have impressed Llywelyn ab Iorwerth. There can be little question that Gerald believed the refusal of four Celtic sees, each offered by a Plantagenet interloper, would have enhanced his stature in Llywelyn’s eyes. Furthermore, his presentation was artful. In the case of the Irish sees he claimed to have declined from John, Gerald managed to tell the story in such a way as to insult Llywelyn’s enemy as unworthy of making such an offer. More significant to Llywelyn would have been Gerald’s claim to have declined the see of Bangor from the hand of William Longchamp, Richard’s first justiciar. Recall that in 1199, while Gerald was at Rome arguing his own case, he also took up the cause of Rotoland, the Elect of Bangor. Rotoland was a Welsh cleric who had, with Llywelyn’s support, twice been elected bishop by the chapter of Bangor. Twice a justiciar of England, Hubert Walter, had imposed his own candidate upon the see instead of Rotoland and against Llywelyn’s wishes. Rotoland was first elected by the chapter of Bangor after Gwion died in 1190. From Llywelyn’s perspective, then, Gerald’s claim that he had been offered and declined this particular see in 1190 was an expression of his deference toward the prince of Gwynedd’s rights and toward the rights of the native Welsh Church.

Not only are episodes in the *De Rebus a se Gestis* more easily interpreted once we accept that Gerald intended it for Llywelyn ab Iorwerth; it also becomes possible to both suggest a narrower range of dates for the composition of the work and offer an explanation for the strange narrative voice Gerald used to tell his story. Both Michael Richter and Robert Bartlett have agreed, on the best evidence, that Gerald wrote the *De
Rebus a se Gestis some time between 1208 and 1216. By juxtaposing political events in Wales with Gerald’s own circumstances during these years, it is possible to narrow this chronological window considerably. I believe Gerald composed the De Rebus between 1212 and 1215. Between 1209 and 1210, Gerald dedicated a version of his Expugnatio Hibernica to King John; while nothing seems to have come of this, the attempt suggests that as late as 1210 Gerald nursed some hope of resuming his old place in Plantagenet favor. John and Llywelyn commenced military hostilities beginning in spring of 1211. During that first year of conflict, Llywelyn narrowly survived John’s devastating incursions into Gwynedd; he did not manage to go on the offensive until autumn of 1212. By spring of 1215, Llywelyn had not only made himself pre-eminent in Wales, he had also, by crossing the March and taking Shrewsbury, declared himself for the rebellious barons and against his father-in-law. Llywelyn’s fortunes in no way diminished between 1215 and 1223, the likely year of Gerald’s death, but by autumn of 1215 Gerald had begun inscribing work to Archbishop Stephen Langton. Langton, an intellectual with long experience in the Paris schools, must have seemed to Gerald a much better prospect for patronage than Llywelyn. The political history of these years, then, when considered

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781 The De Rebus cannot have been begun before 1208, as Gerald wrote of visiting his cousin Meiler in Ireland, “tunc regni justiciarum…” (Giraldi Cambrensis Opera I, p.112). Meiler was removed from the justiciarship of Ireland by John in 1208. The work cannot have been completed much later than 1216, because a large portion of Book VI of the De Invectionibus was copied from the De Rebus a se Gestis, and evidence from Book V of the De Invectionibus suggests that work was itself completed after Innocent III had died (1216). Spec. Duo., pp. xx-xxi.

alongside Gerald’s personal circumstances and the dedications he produced to prospective patrons, suggests that Gerald wrote the *De Rebus a se Gestis* sometime between Llywelyn’s dramatic rebellion against John in late 1212 and 1215, when he began dedicating work to Stephen Langton.

My suggestion that Gerald intended the *De Rebus a se Gestis* for Llywelyn may also explain the singular narrative voice Gerald adopted for the work. That Gerald chose to tell his own story in the third person is not particularly remarkable; he had already done the same thing when writing about his 1188 preaching tour through Wales in the *Itinerarium Kambriae*. In the *Itinerarium*, however, Gerald would at times break into the narrative in such a way as to identify himself as the narrator. In the *De Rebus a se Gestis*, Gerald deliberately constructed the narrative voice to suggest that the work had not been written by himself, but by some anonymous follower.\(^{783}\) This curious distance between Gerald and the narrative voice he adopted to tell the story of his own life can probably best be explained if we accept that Gerald wrote the *De Rebus* for Llywelyn while he was himself still living at Lincoln, but during the years when the prince of Gwynedd was at war with King John.\(^{784}\) Over the course of his career, Gerald more than once expressed an explicit “fear of repercussions” over some of the political opinions he had expressed in writing.\(^{785}\) Just a few years before Gerald composed the *De Rebus a se Gestis*, his estranged nephew had repeated publicly things Gerald had said in private about powerful

\(^{783}\) Please see Introduction, pp. 27-29.

\(^{784}\) Bartlett, p. 99 n. 211.

\(^{785}\) Bartlett, pp. 63-4.
Much of the De Rebus is, of course, rather unflattering toward King John and positively hostile to Plantagenet rule in Wales. Furthermore, Gerald wrote it out of a desire to obtain patronage from Llywelyn, a Welsh prince in open rebellion against the King of England. It is not out of the question, therefore, that Gerald adopted a narrative voice for the De Rebus that would allow him, however implausibly, to disavow the work. This same set of circumstances would certainly explain why the only surviving copy of the De Rebus a se Gestis lacks any dedicatory preface.

One hesitates to offer a final verdict on the De Rebus a se Gestis as a literary or historical work. It is, after all, incomplete; while it is possible for us to have a very good idea what the missing chapters contained, it is not possible to know what subtle – but important – differences may have existed between this lost work and the extant chapters treating similar material in the De Invectionibus and the De Iure et Statu Menevensis Ecclesie. One could make the argument that the De Rebus ought to be adjudged a failure. There can be no doubt that Gerald grossly distorted his public career to make it conform retroactively to the pro-Welsh position he adopted in 1199. This compromises the De Rebus as an historical source. Furthermore, the entire exercise seems to have been fruitless; there is no evidence that Llywelyn took any notice of Gerald whatsoever between 1211 and 1215 – or any time after the St. David’s controversy ended in 1203. There is no reason to believe, after Gerald began inscribing works to Archbishop Stephen Langton in autumn of 1215, that he ever again turned toward Pura Wallia for patronage or position.

786 Spec. Duo., p. 115; 145.
I would argue that the De Rebus a se Gestis does succeed in a way Gerald likely never intended – it reveals something of the character of its author. Underlying Gerald’s attempts to revise, reinterpret, and even obscure episodes in his own public career, we can observe the corrupting effect that proximity to power has on intellectuals. Gerald’s service to two tyrants so compromised him as a public figure that he could not assemble a candid account of his past and expect it to win him patronage or friendship in his homeland. Whatever principles Gerald may have had were themselves so compromised over the course of his service to the powerful that it is useless for us, in attempting to reconstruct what he might or might not have done at critical points in his career, to resort to these principles for guidance. Despite what he wrote in Book III chapter i of the Wechelen story, we know that Gerald did not quit the royal service out of a commitment to religious principle. Did Gerald leave the royal service because Wibert lied about him, or did he simply choose the wrong friends – or the wrong enemies? Did Gerald advise Peter de Leia to excommunicate Rhys in 1197 or didn’t he? Gerald was arch-Gregorian in his politics, but Rhys was his kinsman; which would have been more important to Gerald? It is impossible to be sure. Did Gerald advise the English force assembled at Hay to take swift action against the Welsh rebels besieging Painscastle? Where did his loyalties lie? Can we believe what Gerald tells us either way?

Ironically, it is precisely the Wechelen story, an incident fabricated by Gerald as a part of an effort to reinvent himself, which offers the most dramatic expression of his own internal contradictions. On the one hand, there can be no question but that Gerald, in concocting the anchorite of Llowes, transgressed the sacred by cynically manipulating the charismatic tropes his contemporaries associated with pious solitaries. And yet, a
comparison between Gerald and his anchoritic double reveals that, perhaps unconsciously, Gerald confessed his own shortcomings through the virtues he ascribed to Wechelen. Gerald preached the crusade to others, but when it came time for him to go he sought absolution from a papal legate. Wechelen, on the other hand, made the dangerous pilgrimage to the Holy Land and was so moved by his experience that he had himself enclosed at Llowes. Gerald was born in Wales, but went twice to Paris in pursuit of an elite education; for ten years he applied that education to the worldly service of foreign kings he knew to be tyrants. Wechelen left home only once, to go on pilgrimage, and then had the courage to reject the world in favor of permanent enclosure in Wales; he obtained his rugged Latin as a charismatic gift that flowed out of the ascetical devotion that he practiced in one place. Gerald dedicated much of his life to striving after prebends, positions, an episcopal see and literary fame; his public career culminated in a four-year struggle to obtain the pallium for himself and for St. David’s. Wechelen’s charismatic gifts were recognized by others; rather than struggling for power and position, Wechelen merely waited in his cell and the faithful came to him. Wechelen did not exist, of course, but the contradiction between the ascetical Christian ideals to which Gerald had been exposed in his reading, schooling, and teaching and the conduct of his public life could not have been more real.

Finally, my suggestion that Gerald intended the De Rebus a se Gestis for Llywelyn also sheds some light on how a sophisticated observer saw both Llywelyn and the early thirteenth-century development of Gwynedd, the most “Celtic” of the Welsh principalities. Robert Bartlett has suggested a useful model for understanding the development of high medieval Europe. This model contrasts a “core” consisting of the
territories of the former Carolingian Empire and England with a “periphery” beyond these core boundaries. The core was, by pre-modern standards, both expansionist and fairly uniform in its military, commercial, and religious institutions; the periphery was not. The story of Europe, between 950-1350, then, was the story of both the elites and the migrant populations of the core encountering, fighting, transforming, conquering, and at times colonizing the lands of Moorish Muslims, Slavic and Germanic pagans, and Celtic Christians. The institutions of the core – feudalism and encastellation; the Latin Rite as practiced in Rome; the international religious orders; the universities; guilds and the chartered towns – were the means by which the core acted upon the periphery. Sometimes, as in Scotland or Silesia, the elite of the periphery would adopt these institutions and adapt them to local circumstances, thereby maintaining something of their independent character. Sometimes, as in Wales after 1283, peripheral territories were conquered outright.

Robert Bartlett has characterized Wales in the period from the 1190’s to 1283 as a peripheral territory whose elites attempted – “too late and too slowly” – to stave off conquest by adopting the institutions of the European core: “The thirteenth century princes of Gwynedd built stone castles, fostered fledgling boroughs, and issued charters, so that, by the time of its final conquest in the 1280’s, Gwynedd was more like the England it was facing, in terms of the political structure, than ever before.”787 Obviously, a patron from this developing milieu would not have been Gerald’s first choice; he wrote for Llywelyn at a time when his usual sources of patronage were either in disarray, as

was the English prelacy during the papal interdict of 1208-1213, or no longer interested in him, as was the case with King John. Nevertheless, it is of some significance that Gerald would have written for a Celtic prince at all. Despite having been born in the Celtic periphery to mixed Welsh and Cambro-Norman ancestry, Gerald was very much a man of the core. He studied grammar in England, the trivium, quadrivium, theology and law in Paris, and returned to England late in life for further study. He spent a decade in the service of the Plantagenets, a monarchy that ruled some of the richest territories of the European core while hammering away at the Celtic periphery in Brittany, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. In his career as a cleric, Gerald, like many “reformers” educated on the Continent, consistently denigrated those institutions of the Celtic church that did not conform to Roman norms. In spite of all this, however, sometime between 1212 and 1215 Gerald perceived Llywelyn as a ruler sophisticated, wealthy, and powerful enough that he might have been expected to behave as an English prelate or a member of the Plantagenet family would, and to provide patronage to a man experienced in the curiae of England and Rome and distinguished in his Latin learning. This would seem to affirm Bartlett’s view that the “gradually developing state of the Llywelyns” was indeed adapting to the institutional norms of the European core, and that this adaptation was sufficiently pronounced to have been noticed, and indeed acted upon, by a canny contemporary observer.
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