Throughout the early Middle Ages, British authors and artists depicted their own island as extremely marginal. In the sixth century, Gildas writes that Britain ‘lies almost under the north pole of the world’, and in the eighth century, Bede informs us that ‘Britain is an island almost in the outermost band of the orbit of the earth’s circuit’. Britain was thus connected conceptually to other marginal regions, most particularly to the monstrous ‘East’. This tradition is generally unchallenged in the surviving geographical works until the twelfth century, when Gerald of Wales wrote his remarkable Topographia Hibernica (Topography of Ireland). Part history, part marvels, part miracle story and part topography, his text is a mass of amorous goats, ox-men, bearded ladies, werewolves, gold-toothed fish, speaking crows and eternally burning hedges. This popular work survives in dozens of manuscripts, a handful of which are lavishly illustrated with images possibly designed by Gerald himself. Through close analysis of a selection of the texts and images in these manuscripts, particularly Bl. Royal MS 13.h.VIII, I will explore the ways in which Gerald’s monstrously reflect on both his own identity and anxieties and a broader, emerging notion of English identity.

If Britain was, in its own eyes, geographically and culturally marginal, then Gerald was doubly so. Born to the Welshman William de Barri and the Norman Angharad, whose mother had been a mistress of Henry I, he was part-Welsh and part-Norman. We need not speculate regarding the impact this may have had on his life; despite his status as a leading theologian and his ‘obsessive
ambition' for the position, he was rejected by the king as an applicant for the bishopric at St David's in 1176 because of his Welsh lineage. John O'Meara writes that Henry II 'would not appoint a Welshman to a Welsh see'. As Wilfred Warren writes, 'Henry II’s attempt to define the relationship of Church and State was simply one aspect of an attempt . . . to consolidate his authority as a ruler'. Gerald was part of a growing group of Welsh hybrids that, in the words of Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, 'carries with it something of both parents without fully being either'. Still, Gerald seems to have covered this position for quite some time, reapplied for it in 1198, only to be denied after a four-year battle. Between applications for the see of St David's, Gerald made his first and second visits to Ireland, inspiring his Topography. From the outset, his text subtly shifts the perspective of his readers. Many earlier English authors, such as Bede, Gildas, Nennius and the Anglo-Saxon Chroniclers, temporarily adopted geographically central perspectives, from which they discuss the remoteness of their own lands. For Gerald, conversely, Britain functions as a stable reference point from which we look westward to Ireland. The first book of the Topography begins by establishing the location and size of Ireland, but only in relation to Britain: 'Ireland is the largest of the islands beyond Britain, situated one day's voyage beyond Britannic Wales in the western ocean . . . Nevertheless, Britain surpasses Ireland twice over in size.', Indeed, he writes that Ireland is so close to Britain that 'from both sides of each, the promontories of the lands . . . are visible enough to be able to be seen and noted on a clear day', and yet the view 'from here [is] distinct, but from there more confused on account of the distance (hinc distinctius, illine ratione distantiae confusius)' (p. 22). The distance is, of course, just as far from Britain to Ireland as it is from Ireland to Britain, and so Gerald seems to be suggesting that the British view of the Irish is quite clear, while the reverse is less so.

As mentioned at the outset, Britain and the 'East' (which encompassed Africa and Asia) were connected in the minds of earlier medieval authors in that both were thrust outward to the monstrous edges of the world. As a later manifestation of this long tradition, we should not be surprised to find that Gerald also ties the Far East to 'the most remote islands of the West' (p. 139). In his introduction, he directly compares the East, and its marvels, with Ireland, writing:

For, just as the zones of the East are distinguished and excel in their own prodigies, particular and innate to themselves, so too the borders of the West have been made illustrious through their own marvels of nature. For, on occasion, as if tired of serious and true business, nature withdraws and departs a very little bit, and in these remote parts, she amuses herself with these shy and hidden aberrations (excessibus). (pp. 21–2)

In this vein, Gerald even titled the second book of the Topography 'De mirabilibus Hiberniae et miraculis' (On the marvels and miracles of Ireland, p. 11), thereby making a pointed connection between Ireland and the tradition of the Marvels of the East (De rebus in Oriente mirabilibus), a classically based encyclopedia of monstrous races that survives in numerous unadorned texts, as well as in three illuminated English manuscripts from the tenth, eleventh and twelfth centuries. I would like now to turn to a few of the images of the monstrous people Gerald claims to have seen in Ireland. All of Gerald’s images of Ireland – itself the most marginal of islands – are themselves appropriately confined to the margins of the text. The people, animals and monsters that Gerald’s text places at the edge of the world are visually located at the edges of his pages. Following in the tradition of the Marvels of the East, Gerald presents us with a pair of hybrid creatures who would be well-suited to a modern circus sideshow: the ox-man and the bearded lady. In the Royal manuscript, the image of the bearded lady appears beside the ox-man, at the base of the folio containing her description (Fig. 11):

Duwenaldus, the king of Limerick, had a woman with a beard as far down as her waist. And she had a crest from her neck above, downward along her spine, in the manner of a young animal of a year old, covered in hair. That woman, despite her twofold monstrous prodigies (duplici prodigio monstruositis), was nevertheless not a hermaphrodite, but in other ways was only feminine in nature (sed alias muliebris natura tautum). (p. 107)

From the text, it is not clear what Gerald means when he refers to her as feminine ‘in other ways’, but the images provide some
which were round, and like an ox's in roundness and colour. His face
down to his mouth was flat; for a nose, instead of nostrils he had two
holes, but no projection. (p. 108)

This is a fairly disturbing account and the manuscripts depict the
ox-man much as he is described. Like the bearded lady, the ox-man
in the Royal, as well as the Dublin and Cambridge manuscripts,
is nude. Perhaps this was intended to showcase their semi-human
oddities. The ox-man's human body offsets his deformed, ox-like
extremities. The bearded lady's hairy ridge down her spine is
revealed as well as her breasts, without which she might seem to be
a physically normal man partaking in women's work, such as we
find described at the beginning of the eighth-century Liber
Monstrorum. Naked, she is revealed to be a freak of nature
worthily of inclusion in this text. As John Block Friedman notes, the
nakedness of such creatures could also denote a wild and bestial
nature.

In the Royal version, the bearded lady and the ox-man seem to be
presented as a pair, since both figures occupy the bottom margin of
a single folio. They are both nude, both face right, and both extend
their limbs forward; the ox-man's hand is outstretched to receive a
morsel of food from a member of the FitzGerald court, where he
was apparently kept as an oddity. The images connect these
disparate figures, grouping them into a unit. As such, the ox-man
and bearded lady proclaim Ireland as a land of monsters, although
of a non-threatening nature. However, the Dublin manuscript raises
a different series of issues. On folio 24v, the bearded lady appears
on her own, an isolated freak on her lonely rock. On the following
folio, the ox-man appears with two other images. In the right
margin, we see the cow-deer, which Gerald tells us is the result of
the mating of a cow and a stag (p. 109). In the lower margin, beside
the ox-man, is the goat 'that made bestial love to a certain woman,
who had been trusted with its care' (p. 110). Michelle Brown writes
that a 'prominent element in the visual themes is that of
bestiality'. For Gerald, bestiality - 'with which vice [the Irish are]
particularly afflicted' - transformed the human participants into
beasts, lowering them without elevating their partners (p. 108). Of
the woman who had intercourse with a goat, he writes, 'that most
wretched woman, showing herself more a beast in complying than
he did in performing, even submitted herself to his abuse' (p. 110).
The ox-man is here in the same pose in which we find him in the Royal manuscript. However, since there is no figure distributing food, on its own his outstretched arm seems inexplicable or meaningless. But if we consider the two images in the lower margin as a single unit, the gesture is rendered meaningful. Just as the paired ox-man and bearded lady in the Royal manuscript lent one another context and meaning, so too each member of this pair impacts on the other. The Dublin ox-man gazes across the bas-de-page area to the interspecies lovers and gestures at them in what retrospectively seems a somewhat vicious mockery of a gaze-leading gesture, common in the Middle Ages and ubiquitous in the Renaissance. In an image from the eleventh-century Winchcombe Psalter, for example, Mary gestures inwards to Christ, hanging dead on the cross. Her eyes lead us towards the figure of ultimate human sacrifice and compassion. In the Topography, the misshapen ox-man, with his baleful eyes, guides our gaze towards the same sort of sinful, bestial intercourse which produced him. His gesture implies an accusation: ‘This is how I was created.’ Indeed, his pose – particularly his hoofed forelimbs – mimics that of the fully bestial goat who rises before him. The ox-man stands as a rethke to this act, and his gesture conveys both warning and admonishment.

How, then, might we characterize and categorize the ox-man? He recalls the monstrous races, frequently described as having animal heads on human bodies, but he is less stable than they are. The monstrous races, for all of their free mingling of human and animal parts, are nonetheless races, consistent types, species that could be named and described. As Caroline Walker Bynum notes, ‘a hybrid is not just frozen metamorphosis’ but, rather, a being firmly and permanently composed of the parts of multiple creatures. Gerald’s creatures, unlike the monstrous races, are the distorted living evidence of deeply sinful behaviour, of bestial intercourse. As such, they defy categorization, recalling Orosius’s description of the Minotaur: ‘I do not know whether it is appropriate to speak of a bestial human or a human beast (fero homini, an humanae bestiae).’ Likewise, Gerald writes of the ox-man that ‘a monstrous man was to be seen, if indeed it is right to call him a man’ (p. 108). He continues: ‘Can you associate a monstrous animal, an irrational animal, lacking all inward reason and speech, with the flock (gregg) of the rational? Moreover, can you separate an animal who walks erect, laughing, on two feet from that which is uniquely human?’ (p. 109). Indeed, in this passage Gerald stresses the overlap of human and bestial communities by referring to human society as a ‘flock’. Gerald tells of a second Irish ox-man, referring to him as ‘a half-ox man and a half-man ox (semi bove quem virum seminm varuantque bovem)’ (p. 108). His state is both, and neither, defying categorization and therefore – despite Gerald’s kindly treatment of the figure – rendering him monstrous.

It is worth noting that Gerald did not strictly limit the presence of prodigal births, of mixed creatures, to Ireland. Just as the monsters of the great Hereford world map of the late thirteenth century – which are generally restricted to the map’s outermost regions – do occasionally creep out of their liminal ring, so too Gerald’s Topography describes, in the context of a number of Irish prodigies, a half-horse, half-stag born to a hermit’s mare ‘in Britain near Chester’ (p. 109). This passage is actually the same one that appears in the Itinerarium Cambriae (Itinerary through Wales), written in 1191 and charting Gerald’s journey through Wales to raise support for the Crusades. A subsequent passage from the Itinerary, also set in Wales, conveys more viscerally the disgust held for such cross-bred creatures:

Pregnant by a monkey, a little bitch at length gave birth; the [offsprings'] front parts looked entirely simian, but the rears descended from the dog. When the rustic custodian of the military palace saw them – stupefied by the newborn prodigies, and recoiling from the deformed, biformed forms of nature – with a walking stick which he carried in his hand . . . with great disdain immediately destroyed them all together.

Of all Gerald’s passages describing half-breed creatures, this one conveys most clearly revulsion and contempt. Why would the unfortunate newborn monkey-puppies have been more horrific than the horse-stag, or the ox-man who lived at court for years? Gerald’s other references to canines in this text may provide clues; immediately before the bearded lady and ox-man make their appearance, Gerald gives an account of an Irish couple who, although transformed into wolves, told a priest:

We are humans from Osseary. From this place every seven years, on account of the imprecation of a certain saint, namely Abbot Natalis, two people, a man and a woman, are compelled to go into exile from
their form, for, stripping off the form of a human, they put on that of a wolf. (p. 102)

The wolf-woman has taken ill and so the priest, half in kindness and half in fear, grants her last rites and gives her communion. For Gerald, once again, the monstrous man-beasts are sympathetic – albeit also alarming – characters. Another version of this tale has ‘the whole race of Irishmen’ turned into wolves for seven years. Through these tales, then, the Celts of Ireland are transformed into canines.

Returning to Gerald’s ill-treated monkey-pups, they are themselves the result of the mating of a dog, perhaps Celtic in so far as it lives in Wales, and a monkey, certainly a foreigner, since none are native to Britain. Monkeys also frequently stood in for base or ridiculous humans, appearing in manuscripts and architectural sculpture dressed up in monastic robes, reading, singing and generally cavorting in human ways. If the Celts were referred to as wolves and dogs, and monkeys were base or degraded humans, it might be possible to read into Gerald’s apparent obsession with interbreeding and its consequences, with interspecies miscegenation, a tinge of self-loathing. Gerald was himself, after all, a ‘self-conscious hybrid’, a ‘mongrel’, half-Celtic and half-Norman, in a world that cast a highly prejudiced eye on all things Celtic. In Robert Bartlett’s words:

[Gerald’s] genetic background included Norman warriors and a Welsh princely family. His mother tongue was French, his occupational tongue Latin . . . His class background was knightly, military, and land-holding. He was a member of a vigorous Marcher clan. His order or status was clerical – a secular cleric, curial and scholarly by turn.

He was, like the creatures he describes, the hybrid product of his ‘hybrid society’. As such, Bynum sees Gerald embodying ‘both the possibility and the horror of role combination’. The dog-monkey pair could conceivably be interpreted as a sublimation of Gerald’s parents, his foreign Norman mother who degraded herself through marriage to his Welsh father. Gerald would therefore be, in his own eyes, their monstrous, ‘abhorrent’, half-breed offspring. I do not mean to suggest that Gerald spent his life in wretched misery and shame. To the contrary, he seems to have been a rather confident, even boastful man. And yet, in some of his other works, Gerald left traces of deep-seated frustration. On leaving the Angevin court, he wrote: ‘Whatever esteem my gravity of manner, literary ability and hard work could bring me was taken away by that suspect, dangerous, hateful name – Wales.’ Conversely, when in Wales, he met with anti-Norman prejudices: ‘Both peoples regard me as a stranger and one not their own . . . one nation suspects me, the other hates me.’ Bartlett asserts that, while Gerald was only one-quarter Welsh, this ‘was enough to corrupt him totally in the eyes of a “hostile people”’. Gerald seems to be at his most deeply conflicted state at the end of his Descriptio Cambriae (Description of Wales). In the last three chapters, he provides very detailed and practical information, first on how the Normans could finally succeed in conquering Wales and next on how the Welsh might successfully resist the invasion.

Regardless of his erudition and accomplishments, Gerald was throughout his life denied the bishopric he coveted, owing in large measure to racial prejudice. His Welsh heritage was a frequent target of attacks by his rivals. As he says sympathetically of the half-breeds ox-man, who was killed by youths of the Norman castle of the author’s own FitzGerald kin, ‘he did not deserve their wickedness and envy’ (p. 108).

Some modern Welsh authors have sought to reverse these prejudices and adopt Gerald as a national hero. Robert Morris writes of Gerald’s works, in a book intended for Welsh schoolchildren, ‘it is especially important to us in Wales that their author was a Welshman, and that much of his work describes Wales and its people’. Henry Owen’s tellingly titled Gerald the Welshman, written at the end of the nineteenth century, goes further, including a diagram of Gerald’s family tree, fittingly labelled a ‘Pedigree’, which serves to establish, as one might do for a racehorse or show dog, the purity of Gerald’s Welsh breeding. Indeed, while the tree includes a gratuitous second branch of Gerald’s Welsh cousins, it provides no notations regarding his considerable Norman heritage.

While the application to Gerald’s personality remains a conjecture, his audience to some degree might also have viewed monsters, particularly those with human elements, not only as the Other, but also as the Self. William Miller argues that we feel a greater disgust for that which we perceive as closer to us in some way. Gerald’s Anglo-Norman audience would have had reason to
feel a particular connection with these monsters, these marvels of the West, because they were, to borrow the Old English phrase, fellow mearestapan, fellow border-walkers in the margins of the world. Still, Gerald paints Ireland as a region of even greater marginality, and therefore greater monstrousity. In doing so, Gerald has worked to shift the world's edge further west than earlier writers and artists, and thereby has moved Britain ever so slightly closer to the centre. An examination of the maps included in a number of Topography manuscripts supports this assertion. In contrast with the major English world maps, these maps cover only a portion of the world. The Dublin manuscript map provides the broadest coverage, ranging from Ireland in the West to Rome at the eastern extreme of the map. This places Britain just west of the map's centre. In two other manuscripts, BL Arundel MS 14 and BL Additional MS 33991, the maps are restricted to the British Isles, showing Britain, Ireland and the Orkneys. As they are the only images in these two manuscripts, the maps seem to be of particular significance. They follow some of the general conventions of the world maps, and so are oriented to the east; while on the Hereford world map and its analogues, this appropriately places Terrestrial Paradise at the apex of the maps, on the two maps of the British Isles, this places Britain in the literally superior position. This convention orients the maps, and therefore their representations of the world, towards Britain. No further reference point is necessary to render them meaningful, recalling the opening passage of the Topography, discussed at the outset of this chapter: 'Ireland is the largest of the islands beyond Britain, situated one day's voyage beyond Britannic Wales in the western ocean... Britain surpasses Ireland twice over in size' (pp. 22-4). It seems that the perspective of a cultural outsider was needed to gaze inwards and finally see Britain as central. Bartlett writes, regarding Gerald's perspective:

It is as if there were three concentric circles: One, our world, where there is no need for generalizing description, since everything is taken for granted; the second, outer ring where the barbarians live, peoples whose strange customs prompt us to record them; the third, outermost ring, where the principles of order dissolve and all our fears, fantasies, and projections become real. This sentiment describes the Hereford world map fairly well, with Jerusalem at its centre, the strongholds of Christendom in the mid-region and the monstrous races of Africa and Asia — as well as the British Isles — in the outermost extreme. In this respect, Gerald is at variance, seeing Britain as the centre of this system, not as a node on its outermost edge. While on the Hereford map, Jerusalem provides the context which renders the British Isles as marginal, on these two maps and in Gerald's text, Britain is, for all intents and purposes, the Mainland. As a result of the ravages of time, in the Additional manuscript the green fields filling up the representations of these islands have not only been lost, but seem to have eaten away the vellum as they flaked off. The pigment used here may be verdigris, a somewhat corrosive acetate of copper that effects vellum in various ways: occasionally it corrodes the parchment to such an extent that painted areas actually drop out altogether, leaving gaps in the page. The result is that these marginal islands, for once finally shifted to the glorious light of centre stage, have been themselves reduced to outlines, to mere sliver edges.

Gerald also manages to introduce a curious bit of cultural relativism towards the end of his text through his description of two naked men in a boat from Connacht who 'thus far had heard nothing and knew nothing about Christ', a situation which may have struck many readers and listeners as more horrifying than the monsters and marvels (p. 171). The images in the Dublin and Royal manuscripts are almost identical, each showing two men, naked 'except for broad belts of crude animal hides which they drew tight' (p. 170). Their boat does not have an identifiable prow or stern, which is perhaps by design since the two bewildered men seem to be rowing in opposite directions. Sailing metaphors for spiritual journeys are rather common in medieval English literature, the elegiac poem 'The Seafarer', from the tenth-century Exeter Book, being a prime example. With this in mind, the navigational difficulties of the men in the boat, bereft of any knowledge of Christ, may be viewed as a lack of spiritual direction. Interestingly, the men are wary of bread and cheese, having never seen either, and so they refuse to eat them. They were fascinated by these foods, 'and so they returned, carrying back with them one loaf of bread and a cheese, in order that they might show to the amazement of their people what food foreign races eat' (p. 171). In this passage, Gerald’s Anglo-Norman audience is invited to adopt temporarily the perspective of people more
marginal than themselves. These naked men, who are for Gerald’s readers marvels, in and of themselves, look at bread and cheese, two of the more basic staples of life in Europe, as marvellous. Just as they are marvellous to us, Gerald implicitly argues, so too we are marvellous to them.

The Topography provides one final element for my discussion. In a number of its passages, locales exert powerful effects on their inhabitants. For example, Gerald describes a series of islands, each of which bears its own unique properties. One island in ‘a lake north of Munster’ prevents any sort of natural death, so that the very ill and the very old must leave the island to seek the release of death (p. 80). A nearby island causes instant death to any women or female animals brought there (p. 80). Even female birds must fly by, while their mates land for a rest. On yet another, ‘human corpses in the open air do not putrefy’ (p. 82). Ireland, itself, refuses the presence of poisonous reptiles and of poisons, in general, which lose their potency if imported. Even the very soil of Ireland bears the island’s magical properties, repelling poisonous worms ‘if another region or garden, or any other place at all, is sprinkled with the dust of it’ (p. 64). So powerful and odd were the forces attributed to Ireland that even its saints, ‘more so than the saints of other regions, seem to be of a vindictive spirit’ (p. 137).

Through these various accounts, Gerald constructs a world-view in which locations dictate the qualities of their inhabitants. He is not, of course, the first to do so, and the tradition in Anglo-Saxon England can be traced back at least to Bede. Indeed, according to Bartlett, Gerald ‘drew strength from seeing himself in the tradition of Gildas or Bede’; Gerald’s description of Ireland’s refusal of reptiles is borrowed from the Ecclesiastical History. The pattern of lands influencing inhabitants is somewhat complicated by Gerald’s account of the deformed populace of Ireland, which Gerald tells us is overflowing not only with ox-men and bearded ladies, but also with ‘so many born blind, so many lame, so many with imperfect bodies, deprived of the beneficence of nature’ (p. 181). These people are, he says, deformed because they are ‘an adulterous race, an incestuous race, a race of illegitimate birth and conception, a race outside of the law, fouly ravishing nature herself with hateful and hostile craft’ (p. 181). Here, the land itself is not blamed for the condition of its inhabitants. However, its peripheral location was linked to the character of the people, in turn resulting in their physical deformity.

For Gerald, the Topography of Ireland was not a passing fancy, a whimsical text casually produced for the amusement of his friends. Rather, it was in a way his great work, his life’s obsession. Gerald originally began the text around 1185 but he returned to it repeatedly, expanding and embellishing it through the forty years which remained of his life. In this way, like the creatures within it, the text itself became monstrous, forever shifting, bursting out of its covers. Still, his efforts were rewarded, as the Topography was one of his most popular works. It survives in dozens of copies, whereas his ecclesiastical works generally survive in only one or two. In the Royal manuscript, the folios of the second section—the ‘Marvels’—are more soiled, yellowed and stained than the rest of the manuscript, particularly in the lower right margins of their recto sides. This is where one generally holds the pages, in order to turn them. While it is not clear when this section was soiled, it is likely that the grime is the accumulation of centuries of use. This section has been the most well-used—and therefore must have been the most interesting part of the book—for quite some time. The monstrous people, the bestial women, the saintly men and the miraculous islands combined to draw attention and hold it.

In the illuminated versions of Gerald’s Topography, the illustrations are appropriately marginal in their location on the page as well as their content, connecting the format of the book with prevailing notions of geography. For Michael Camille, improper use of books turned the margins into cesspools, filled with writing and doodles, but also snot, food, spittle and worse. The margins are, for Camille, where the book and the body meet. For Gerald, they are not cesspools, not repositories reserved for the vile. Rather, they are spaces where bodies meet other bodies. They are spaces of infinite possibilities, where monsters can interbreed but also where saints can safely sit. Such were the margins of his text, and such were the margins of his world.

Notes


2 This connection is most apparent on the great English world maps, which depict a circular world with Jerusalem as its hub, and a zone of barrenness as its outer limit, containing the monsters of Africa, Asia and Scandinavia but also containing the British Isles. For further discussion, see my dissertation, 'Living at the edge of the world: marginality and monstrosity in Anglo-Saxon manuscripts and beyond' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Stanford University, 2003).

3 These manuscripts include: BL, Royal MS 13.B.VIII; Dublin, National Library MS 700; Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Laud. Misc. 720; Cambridge, University Library, MS E.F.1.27 (hereafter Royal, Dublin, Bodleian and Cambridge). All four are thirteenth-century manuscripts and it is generally believed that their production was interconnected. For a recent discussion of their dating and the argument for Gerald's own involvement in the illustration, see Michelle Brown, 'Marvels of the West: Gildas Cambrensis and the role of the author in the development of marginal illustration,' in Anthony G. Edwards (ed.), Decoration and Illustration in Medieval English Manuscripts. English Manuscript Studies, 10 (London: British Library, 2002), pp. 34–59. For catalogue entries, see Nigel J. Morgan, Early Gothic Manuscripts I (1): 1100–1250 (London: Harvey Miller, 1982), nos. 59(a) and 59(b); Nigel J. Morgan, Early Gothic Manuscripts II: 1250–1285 (London: Harvey Miller, 1988), no. 116. Morgan makes a similar suggestion about the illustrations, writing in reference to the London Manuscript: 'Very possibly the original versions of the subjects were sketches by Gildas himself in his no longer extant autograph copy.' Early Gothic Manuscripts I, p. 105. Rhonda Knight presents a counterargument that the wrong monsters, and miracles representing colonial fantasies in Gerald of Wales's Topographia Hibernica, Studies in Iconography, 22 (2001), 55–86 (p. 60). Still, the arguments in favour are more numerous and compelling.

4 Morgan, Early Gothic Manuscripts II, p. 105.


6 Wilfred E. Warren, Henry II (London: Eyre Methuen, 1977), p. 93. Henry's dislike of 'foreign' bishops is further evinced by his dealings with Scotland: when the Scottish bishop of Glasgow 'took all Cambria for his diocese and dedicated churches south of the Solway, Henry showed his displeasure by forcing through the creation of a bishopric at Carlisle' (ibid., p. 177). He further asserted his right to rule over the Church in a treaty with Scotland demanding that 'the Scottish church shall make submission to the English church as it ought to do' (ibid., p. 185; Warren's translation).


9 Gerald of Wales, Topographia Hibernica et Expugnatione Hibernica, in Gildas Cambrensis Opera, ed. J. S. Brewer, James F. Dimock and G. F. Warner, 8 vols, Rolls Series, 21 (London: Longman, Green, Reader & Dyer, 1861–91), v (1867), pp. 22–4. Further references to this volume will be made in parentheses in the text. Here, Gerald seems to be borrowing from Bede, Ecclesiastical History, p. 18.
Idols and Simulacra: Paganity, Hybridity and Representation in Mandeville’s Travels

SARAH SALIH

Therefore, just as it was possible for God to make such natural kinds as He wished, so it is possible for him to change those natural kinds into whatever he wishes. From this power comes the wild profusion of those marvels which are called omens, signs, portents, prodigies. If I should try to recall and enumerate these, where would this treatise end? The various names monstr, ostenta, portenta, prodigia come from the verbs monstrare ‘show’ because they show something by a sign, ostendere ‘display’, portendere ‘spread in front’, that is, display beforehand, and porro dicere ‘say atorntime’, that is, predict the future.¹

A monstre is a þing difformd aȝen kynde [contrary to nature] bothe of man or of best or of ony þing elles þat is clopid a Monstre.²

Monsters ‘aȝen kynde’ are queer things, things which violate and in that violation confirm natural order and the logic of Creation. As hybrids, mutations, botched copies, they testify to the primacy of the whole, the origin, the self-identical. Monsters are currently in favour, and great claims are made for them. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen posits the monster as the key to reading cultural meanings:

This examination necessarily involves how the manifold boundaries (temporal, geographic, bodily, technological) that constitute culture become imbricated in the construction of the monster – a category that is itself a kind of limit case, an extreme version of marginalization, an

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¹ Bartlett, Gerald of Wales, p. 20.
² Ibid., p. 148.