

# “GO WEST, YOUNG MAN!”: A VERNACULAR ANGLO-NORMAN CHRONICLE FROM THIRTEENTH- CENTURY IRELAND\*

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The vernacular literary record of the Anglo-Norman invasion and settlement of twelfth- and thirteenth-century Ireland is a sparse one. Leaving to one side the native annals and the more indirect reflection of these events as a stimulus to the compilation of the great codices such as the Book of Leinster and the Book of the Dun Cow,<sup>1</sup> only two documents are extant in the French language. One, little marked by Anglo-Norman dialect features, is a poem from 1265 commemorating the completion of trench and bank fortifications at New Ross.<sup>2</sup> The other, more substantial work is a chronicle of 3459 rhymed octosyllabic couplets in Anglo-Norman French, dated to 1225 or 1230; the single manuscript is incomplete at beginning and end.

With the exception of the introductory episode, the body of the work commences with events in 1166, details the advent of the Cambro-Norman adventurers and the first imposition of English power in Ireland, and may well have ended with the death of a major figure in 1176. Although more restricted in temporal span and somewhat more in scope than Giraldus Cambrensis' *Expugnatio hibernica*, dating from 1188-89, it has served historians as a major source for this last surge of Norman expansionism. The manuscript was last edited in 1892 by Goddard H. Orpen as *The Song of Dermot and the Earl* and served as key evidence for much of his *Ireland Under the Normans*.<sup>3</sup> In fact, M. Domenica Legge, in her authoritative

*Anglo-Norman Literature and its Background*, claims that "the editor had, very naturally, an exaggerated idea of its historical value. . . ." <sup>4</sup> A new edition of the work is now in progress as part of the series of ancillary mediaeval documents accompanying the nine-volume *A New History of Ireland*. As members of the editorial team at work on the *Song* (which appears to be the working title, although the published volume may well carry another) had previously provided a new edition and translation of Giraldus' *Expugnatio hibernica*, with full historical notes, we may expect a fresh and soundly based assessment of the historical value of the chronicle. <sup>5</sup> The new volume will, no doubt, also confirm or qualify judgments made by the editors of the *Expugnatio*. A.B. Scott writes: "To compare Giraldus with the anonymous author of the *Song of Dermot and the Earl* is to compare a wayward but trained scholar, possessed of wide experience of the world outside Ireland, with a skilful but naive craftsman" (xxxiii). In a similar vein he states: "As a *chanson de geste* it [*The Song*] belongs to a quite different *genre* to the *Expugnatio*, and this fact, that it is a poem, and belongs to a *genre* which has its own particular ethos, means that it has to be used with great caution" (xviii).

The publication, however, of the new edition of the chronicle still pending, it does seem possible to address some of the concerns at the heart of these latter comments ("skilful," "naive," "*chanson de geste*") and, in so doing, consider the vernacular work as a document reflecting social history, to the extent that this can be distinguished from the military and political history which is its primary focus. What can the poem reveal about the attraction and resistance of invaders and settlers to Gaelic culture in Ireland? What can its unique status tell us about the determinants and relative speed of change and adjustment and about the perception and understanding of these dynamics on the part of the chronicler, patron, and public?

As concerns historiographical method in general, some notion of the chronicler's criteria of relevance can be gained from a consideration of what he judges extraneous to his narrative framework. In general his focus is squarely on Ireland, and events in Wales, Scotland, and on the continent, such as missions to Henry II or Prince John's revolt, are recounted in very succinct fashion. An especially revealing example is found in the last some 400 lines of the work. They tell how the earl of the title, Richard fitz Gilbert de Clare, gave the constablership of

Leinster to his brother-in-law, Raymond fitz William, *le Gros*, until the daughter of Robert de Quency, the late constable, came of age (vv. 3032-59). An earlier passage, also relatively extensive, was devoted to the circumstances of Robert's death (vv. 2807 ff.). Later this daughter married Philip de Prendergast, who is described in very personal fashion as a most irascible man to meet before breakfast but the most amiable afterwards. He assumed the constableness which came to his wife on maturity and held it long and well. Finally, "I do not want to tell more of him, I will return to my matter" -- *De lui ne voil ici conter, A ma materie voil repeirer* (vv. 3058 f.). Philip de Prendergast is extraneous to the chronicle because he was not an actor in its principal events between 1166 and 1176, although he later occupied a position of some consequence in Anglo-Norman Ireland, apparently achieving a practical balance with the major factions.

Other information which either lies outside the temporal frame of the chronicle or which occupies within it a place apparently out of proportion to its significance on the larger political scene has led me to the conclusion that Philip and his wife Maud were the patrons of the poem. This evidence can be briefly recapitulated.<sup>6</sup> Only four marriages are mentioned in the history: those of Richard de Clare (also called Strongbow in English sources, although the epithet properly belongs to his father) and Aoífe, daughter of King Diarmait of Leinster (the king of the title), of Robert de Quency and Strongbow's daughter by an earlier marriage, of Raymond fitz William and Basilia, the Earl's sister, and of Philip and Maud. The members of this group were interrelated by blood, marriage, tenure of office, and by geographical proximity, as the de Quency holdings in the Duffry and the Prendergast lands at Fernegenal were close to the Earl's estates in Uí Chennselaig in south-eastern Ireland. This also explains why the historical events of the region are particularly well covered and why some, related to lesser figures, are given prominence through anticipations, complemented by fuller mention in the correct chronological sequence.

The functions of the chronicle as regional history, history of public office, and family history become even clearer when we turn to Richard de Clare, grandfather of (in my opinion) the patroness. The chronicle glosses over any difficulties concerning his Welsh and Norman estates that he may have had with Henry II before and during the Irish

adventure and attributes them to mischief-makers (vv. 2241 ff.). But while uniformly positive, the account does not appear to have inflated the role played by Strongbow in the invasion. The same can be said, with certain reservations, of the figure of Maurice de Prendergast, father of the patron Philip, and among the first to respond to the call to service in Ireland. While Giraldus makes only one reference to him as a *vir probus et strenuus*, the chronicle makes him a principal figure in the first phase of the invasion, on occasion even an independent one.<sup>7</sup> Two significant episodes, one before and one after the Earl's arrival in Ireland, will be discussed below.

The account of events in Ireland in both this work and in Giraldus' conforms to the pattern of other early French chronicles of near-contemporary events, in which the "home contingent" is given just slightly more than its due. This is a quite overt and conscious bias. But this recognition of preferential treatment can lead us to a consideration of a deeper level at which the poem operates. It will assist in defining the ethos of the work, the world view and value system that are implicit in the choice of material, presentation of personalities, explanation of motives, and possible recognition of other, more abstract factors determining the historical process.

In an introductory portion reaching back to 1152 the chronicle recounts how Diarmait mac Murchada, king of Leinster, staged the abduction of Dearbhfhorgail, wife of Tigernán Ua Ruairc, lord of Breifne, as an act of vengeance. But with the nominal accession in 1166 of Ruaidhraí Ua Conchobair to the high-kingship, "high-king with opposition," Diarmait's fortunes changed since Ua Ruairc was allied with Ruaidhraí. Dearbhfhorgail and her cattle were restored, and Diarmait's residence was burned. At this point he sought out Henry II of England in Aquitaine and obtained the equivalent of letters patent to recruit Norman knights and forces. The action thus far (vv. 12-295) is readily comprehensible in exclusively Irish terms -- in the terms of a romance, one might say. But when Diarmait swears fealty to Henry II, we move into the Norman world. The knights Diarmait is empowered to muster will be engaged in restoring a legitimate ruler with powerful sponsorship to his rightful lands. Yet those who first followed Diarmait to Ireland were drawn from the Welsh marches or, like Prendergast, from the Flemish colony established at Rhos in Pembrokeshire under Henry I, and would have been those who had suffered

most as land-holders from the resurgence of native Welsh political power and Welsh accommodation with Henry II. These knights were at loose ends in a kind of political no-man's-land, and unless they could be drawn off to Henry's continental wars, they would be less of an irritant to his appeasement and consolidating policies in the West if manfully employed in Ireland. This haphazard approach was to bedevil Anglo-Irish affairs for some time, resulting in an invasion, seizure, and settlement that were largely undirected and initially incomplete, but for those involved, relatively pragmatic.<sup>8</sup>

Even though Diarmait makes explicit, via direct discourse (vv. 431 ff.), the promise of land or pay, the Norman knights are assisting Diarmait in recovering his lawful kingdom, and the political situation can be described in simple black and white terms. Diarmait's opponents, petty Irish kings and chieftains, are *traitres* and *feluns*, traitors and criminals (vv. 136, 141, 599). The picture of Diarmait in the chronicle is, no doubt, an intentionally rudimentary one. There is nothing specifically Irish about him. Giraldus, on the other hand, has a scene of Diarmait gnawing the features of the severed head of a defeated enemy (I.4). Here, he is simply and repeatedly referred to as the rich and powerful king, attributes which would apply equally well to any continental European ruler.<sup>9</sup> The explanation for this view of Diarmait is to be found in the fact that he was the father-in-law of the grandfather of the poem's patroness. Although Diarmait is a far from passive figure as he leads his troops back and forth across Leinster, he is a rather unsubstantial one. Essentially a legitimizing figure in the chronicle, he provides explanation and justification of the Norman presence in Ireland. This is most apparent in the very brief mention of his death in 1171 at the exact mid-point of the extant text (vv. 1730 f.). With his death, a page is turned in Irish history; Earl Richard inherits the kingdom of Leinster and he, thereafter, is the legitimizing power, until the later advent of Henry II.

Rather than Diarmait or Richard, it is Maurice de Prendergast and his peers who stimulate the greatest engagement on the part of the author. In one of the first direct speeches in the work, Prendergast speaks words of encouragement to his men before the initial clash with the Irish. Three times he uses the word *communal*, "communal, collective" (vv. 665 ff.). This is a clue to the ethos of the chronicle. These were land-

hungry mercenary intruders in a foreign social and political environment, initially with only token approval from and allegiance to the distant king of England. Their sole recourse was to each other, and their security lay in their common military professionalism.<sup>10</sup> Note, for example, the very explicit reference to the care given the wounded (vv. 820 ff.). Knights like Maurice de Prendergast, Robert fitz Stephen, Raymond fitz William, Miles de Cogan, Meiler fitz Henry, and Maurice fitz Gerald are the real actors of the chronicle. In most of the military engagements, although the earl of Diarmait may be the leader, it is one or another of these who devises a clever stratagem, makes a bold sortie, or is otherwise explicitly identified as the best man on the battlefield that day (e.g., vv. 765 ff.). Concluding with events in 1176, the chronicle deals only with the heroic phase of the Anglo-Norman presence in Ireland. It, then, has no villains, unlike Giraldus' history in which he contrasts the military invader contingent, led by his relatives, with the later intriguing royal officers, like William fitz Aldelin and Hervey de Montmorency, sent out to administer the Ireland others had conquered.<sup>11</sup> None the less, the figures of the Anglo-Norman chronicle are stereotyped and nearly indistinguishable. None of the vignettes has the familiar detail of the portrait of Philip de Prendergast. We do, however, learn the name of Prendergast's horse, Blanchard (v. 737), and the common war-cry of the invaders -- "Seint David!" (v. 745), reflecting their immediate Welsh geographical origins, more than their place in English affairs or their Anglo-Norman culture. One or another of these heroes is always near the centre of the stage and, in general terms, Raymond le Gros assumes in the second half of the chronicle the lead position vacated by Prendergast.

Just as Raymond at one point withdrew with his troops to Wales because the earl initially refused him his sister in marriage, so Maurice de Prendergast was not continuously in the service of Diarmait and, indirectly, the Norman cause. When Diarmait had regained most of his kingdom, there appears to have been some kind of falling out between him and Prendergast, possibly over pay. Prendergast tried to return to Wales, but Diarmait ordered the master mariners of Wexford to refuse him passage. In an abrupt about-face, Prendergast then offers to enter the service of one of Diarmait's enemies, Mac Gilla Pátraic, king of Osraige, the very opponent from his first encounter in Ireland (vv. 1089 ff.).

Soon he is fighting against his former ally Donnall Caemánach, Diarmait's son. This is clearly a mercenary arrangement and is perhaps best understood as illustrating the necessity to take sides rather than try to survive in military and political isolation. Putting one's sword up for hire was clearly acceptable practice. The moral question was not the justice of the cause served, but the quality of the military service rendered. During this period, which earned Maurice the nickname among the Irish of *Osseriath*, of Osraige (v. 1146), other Cambro-Normans remained in or entered Diarmait's employ. The chronicle discreetly shifts its focus to the new arrivals from Wales, among whom Raymond le Gros, and gives no graphic account of Prendergast's soldiering on behalf of the king of Osraige. He seems to have arranged matters to avoid any direct military confrontation with the other Normans (vv. 1244 ff.). Later, after the chronicle in a unique instance reveals Maurice's thoughts of others' treachery (vv. 1266 ff.), he is able to return to Wales with his men by means of a clever ruse, despite efforts by some of Mac Gilla Pátraic's men to prevent them and recover their wages (vv. 1324 ff.).

This episode has a later pendant when Prendergast, again in Strongbow's service, after accompanying Laurence O'Toole (later canonized as St Laurence)<sup>12</sup> on an embassy to the Hiberno-Norse (vv. 1843 ff.), acts as envoy and guarantor of Mac Gilla Pátraic, when he comes before the earl (vv. 2055 ff.). He extracts an oath from each of the Norman knights that the king will be unharmed. Later, he must stand down his peers with direct threats to assure the Irish leader's safe withdrawal. The incident closes with Prendergast presenting his folded glove to the earl and offering to make amends if he has acted out of line (vv. 2149 ff.). The first episode of Prendergast's term of service with the king of Osraige was presented without judgment. The second incident, with Prendergast standing by his word of guarantor and with his Norman peers cast in the questionable moral role, more than cancels out any negative impression caused by his temporary deviation from the cause of restoring Diarmait. Giraldus' work, on the other hand, does have a reference to fair-weather friends (*amicis hirundineis*, I.5), who abandoned Diarmait, and it is tempting to think that Maurice and others like him may be the target of this veiled criticism. One may question just how important in the larger political context was this appearance of Mac Gilla Pátraic

and Prendergast before the earl. It seems more to belong to the category of family reminiscences. This is the last major scene with Prendergast, although he is mentioned as having been sent to aid Henry II in England, and his name figures conspicuously in the list of land grants made in Leinster (vv. 3072 ff.).

The portrait of Maurice de Prendergast is flattering, but by no means personalized. It is given relief, like those of his peers, by the attribution of brief speeches given as direct discourse. Like the more amplified examples in Giraldus (I.23), these tend to be rather rhetorical harangues of encouragement or advice. Dialogue, in the sense of responses to such speeches, is rare. A speaker such as Maurice is then given more prominence than the earl or king whose replies are given as indirect discourse, if at all (e.g., vv. 726-35, 1244-49, 1305 ff.). Other rudimentary stylistic means to add emphasis are to repeat incidents a second or third time in brief, two- or four-line résumés, perhaps a simplified carry-over from the narrative technique of the *chansons de geste* (vv. 330-39).<sup>13</sup> Another is to refer to *l'estoire* or *la gent*, the history or popular account, as authenticating sources for key events recounted (e.g., vv. 315, 327). These references to authority do not necessarily mean that the chronicler has based his work on written documentation, with the probable exception of the list of land grants. The fragmentary preface is at pains to emphasize that the author had the story from Maurice Regan, Diarmait's interpreter, but it seems unlikely that there was a prior written history of Diarmait or of the Earl, and even more unlikely of both together, in either Irish or Latin.<sup>14</sup> Giraldus, on the other hand, quotes Latin documents *in extenso*, and the debate continues as to which are authentic, which paraphrases, and which fabrications. The Irish world of the chronicle is largely a non-literate one, with a single exception. Diarmait seeks out Henry face to face to request support, but it comes only in the form of letters patent, and this, while no doubt accurate, does make Henry somewhat of a *roi fainéant*. All the remaining agreements are verbal ones, typically made in public, as the chronicle says *veant trestut son baroné* -- in the sight of all his knights (v. 505). It is the publicly said and seen which is important. Similarly, the work gives no hint of the papal bull *Laudabiliter* that empowered Henry II to enter Ireland, ostensibly to reform Irish ecclesiastical abuses, although Henry never invoked this document and the



first gains of the invasion could be secured without it. And if the agreement for the Earl to inherit Leinster on Diarmait's death was committed to parchment, the poem makes no mention of it.

This contract is presented by the chronicle in the simplest feudal terms. The earl provides the king with military assistance to regain his kingdom. In return he receives Diarmait's daughter in marriage and the kingdom on the king's death. He then grants land to his vassals in return for their military service. The Anglo-Norman poem makes not the slightest reference to just how antithetical this contract would have been to Irish custom and law. In parenthesis one may question the integrity of Diarmait's motives. In early Ireland, land was the inalienable property of the family. *Fintiu* or "kinland" could not be sold or given away without the full consent of the family. Traditionally, the Irish king gave his subjects cattle and received tribute in kind for them. His subjects did not hold their land of him in any feudal sense. Irish wars, in this early period, were not for territorial conquest, but were basically cattle-raids, designed to increase disposable wealth and personal prestige. None the less, by the twelfth century and perhaps largely as a consequence of the destabilizing effects of the earlier Norse raids, warfare now had a definite element of territorial expansion, entailing not only the extension of political power but also some "loss of title" to the conquered lordships. Thus the opposition between the kinland of the Irish and the Norman concept of swordland, held by right of conquest, was already blurred to a considerable extent. The Normans also went on cattle-raids, but a prime concern remained land and rents.<sup>15</sup>

With reference to those Irish kings who chose to submit to Henry when he toured the island in 1171 and effectively capped the power of the Earl Richard, Michael Dolley has written of the "ambiguous pattern of Irish submissions": "The English king thought he was granting away his own property, while the Irish princes thought they were merely obtaining for their Irish freeholds an effective royal guarantee against dispossession" (p. 94). For them, "coming into Henry's house," to translate the Irish idiom, was no different than acknowledging a superior Irish king. Henry was thinking in terms of homage, the Irish at best in terms of fealty. This, at least, has been a traditional view. The recent editors of Giraldus suggest that the Irish may have both given homage and been aware of its implications,<sup>16</sup> but we have no means of assessing how

scrupulously they planned to abide by the conditions of this feudal agreement. Their own domestic alliances often lasted no longer than a single raiding season.

W.L. Warren concluded his provocative essay on the interpretation of twelfth-century Irish history with these words: "In the middle ages a foreigner was not so much a man of different race or language (for these things were too common to be remarkable) -- a foreigner was a man who led a different way of life" (p. 19). With this, he is saying that the Normans found the Irish very foreign -- and no doubt *vice versa*. What appreciation of this fundamental change of circumstances is reflected in a work sponsored by a family ultimately Flemish in origin, Norman in language and culture, Welsh in immediate antecedents, and now landed in Ireland? One of the most revealing and conscious references in the work to the exposed situation of the Norman invaders occurs toward the end of the work:

Sachez les tuz, en tele manere  
 Esteit herbergé la tere  
 E de chastels e de cités,  
 De dunguns e de fermetés.  
 Ki ben erent aracinez  
 Les gentils vassals alosés. (vv. 3202-07)

Although this is explicitly a statement of the Normans' need for security against Irish reprisals, it is also a recognition that rural Ireland's essentially pastoral economy and social order were not marked by castles or cities, other than the trading ports like Dublin, Wexford, and Waterford, established by the Norse (cf. Giraldus, II.21). But the vantage point of the land hungry Normans was not that of the visiting ethnographer looking to record exotic custom -- although Giraldus does provide some of this detail, however biased, in the *Topographia Hibernica*, and in this is distinguished from most mediaeval historians.<sup>17</sup>

How full a picture of Ireland is found in the chronicle? As noted, the portrait of Diarmait seems to have been purposely dehibernicized, but not that of his followers. The Irish practice of taking heads was an inescapable fact and after one engagement 220 are brought before Diarmait (v. 777). On another occasion, a defeated king is beheaded (albeit by Strongbow), and his body thrown to the dogs (vv. 2173 ff.).<sup>18</sup>

There is occasional reference to the Irish style of military operations. Unlike the mounted Norman knights and their men-at-arms, the Irish were on foot and wore no mail, and are then characterized by Prendergast as "naked" and "light" (vv. 672, 2879). The usual weapons were slings, light javelins, and a hand-axe or short sword. Thus they were ill-equipped to meet on level ground a massed Norman cavalry charge, supported by archers. Their small advantage lay in guerilla-like attacks, which the chronicler calls "swift as the wind" (v. 663). The Irish defences were relatively simple: trenches, banks, stakes, and hurdles (vv. 560 ff., 1014 ff.). Such experience gave them no means to lay siege to the Normans' motte and bailey castles. These accounts of military operations leave us with an occasional glimpse of the Irish landscape, such as *les gués*, the fords, *les landes*, the moors, although this was a landscape far different from that of today and well before the extensive deforestation. Perhaps as an amusing touch, Miles de Cogan's land grant on Mount Brandon in remote west Kerry, far from the Prendergasts, is called the wildest spot, on mountain or plain, in the world (vv. 1653 f.). One wonders whether this also shows some awareness of pre-Christian and Christian religious practices on the mountain. Perhaps a similar touch is found in the reference to a phantom army which threw the troops into disarray one night (vv. 970 f.), a not uncommon Irish literary motif. The site, Dind Rig (probably Oenach Carmain at Carlow), was also associated with exceptional military events in the Irish epic tradition.<sup>19</sup>

In general, however, the chronicle seems to have resolutely played down the use of local colour, perhaps because it was all too familiar to the patrons. Although the chronicle has a wealth of Irish personal and place names, some of the latter in their Norse-Irish version, there is only a single Irish word: *langport* for *longphort*, to designate an Irish encampment (v. 1000).<sup>20</sup>

Although it nowhere informs the account of actual events, the chronicler had some awareness of Irish political organization, as when he says that in Ireland there were as many kings as counts elsewhere (vv. 2191 f.). This fact was all too apparent to the Normans and explains in part their difficulty in consolidating military gains. Historians estimate up to 100 lordships and six kingdoms of consequence at a time when the total population was about a million and a third.<sup>21</sup> The poet, like Giraldus, also knew of Ireland's division into chief

provinces, but he lists six rather than the traditional five (vv. 2193 ff.). The addition, Desmond, lay to the immediate west of Leinster, scene of most of the chronicle's action. The poem also refers to the brothers who first held these provinces, an echo of Irish traditions of the *Lebor Gabála Éirenn* (*Book of Invasions of Ireland*). Later Anglo-Norman historians would cite the repeated invasions from this source as a justification for and prefiguration of their own.

The poem makes no real distinction between the mixed Hiberno-Norse populations of the coastal towns and the native Irish; all are *yrreis* even if they bear names like Askulv mac Torkil. We do, however, have some offshore *exotica* in the *norreis*, Norsemen from the Western Isles, Man, and Norway, led by a latter-day berserker, Jehan le Devé, John the Wode or Mad (vv. 2257 ff.). In much the same way the invaders are simply *engleis* since England is their country of residence and it is to that king they owed perfunctory allegiance (vv. 467, 691). This is as true of the half-Welsh, half-Norman Geraldines as of the Flemings from Pembroke-shire. This is, however, not due to an ignorance of geographical origins. As a rhetorical flourish, the chronicler states on one occasion that French, Normans, and Flemings all gave pledges for Robert fitz Stephen (v. 2648). The make-up of the dominant class in England was not forgotten and allegiance was to this class and its collective economic and military power. The French language was a medium for communication; it was not an ethnic identifier.<sup>22</sup>

Historians, Irish historians one should add, have written of the isolated development of the Irish mentality, of its deep distrust of the better organized, materially more powerful outsiders. Perhaps from the Norman perspective, Maurice Sheehy writes of the Gaels' "treacherous sensitivity, insidiously paralyzing inertia and mercurial elusiveness."<sup>23</sup> From the Irish perspective, on the other hand, he writes of how clerics' and poets' "imaginative, concrete and backward look preserved and perpetuated this cultural non-territorial unity against the philosophical and juridical notions of the organized society of medieval Europe" (p. 36).<sup>24</sup>

By 1225, the presumed date of the chronicle, Ireland was filling up with settlers, bureaucrats, and military adventurers. After 1175, Henry and then John began to sign away land that was not even theoretically theirs to grant, and there appears to have been more of a free-booting, rapacious spirit (despite the administrative changes and the incipient

central government in Dublin) than in the early years of the invasion. Each succeeding wave of immigrants seems both to have been absorbed by the native Irish -- for few save the chieftains were actually dispossessed of their land and even then upper class intermarriage was frequent -- and to have been exploited whenever possible by the next incoming wave.<sup>25</sup> Of all this, the Anglo-Norman chronicle, perhaps disappointingly, provides very little evidence. This may just possibly be attributed to the poet, perhaps a relative newcomer from England, but appears more likely related to the poem's sponsorship and to the conception of historiographical relevance. Just as in contrast to Giraldus there is no mention of ecclesiastical matters like the deficiencies in pastoral care, or Irish marital customs, so denounced by Giraldus and Rome, there is, despite the year of composition, only brief mention of events after 1176, and these are like the anachronistic inclusion of a patron in a historical canvas depicting an earlier era.

The patrons of the chronicle were not dissimilar to other Norman and Anglo-Norman families that encouraged vernacular historiography. It would appear that the chronicle's sponsors wanted a historical record of the first decade of military activity, the radical change in the family's circumstances, and a vindication of their right of possession -- although, unlike many contemporary chronicles, the unfolding of history is not credited to the realization of the workings of divine Providence.<sup>26</sup> The commissioning of the poem resulted in an instantly documented past, but excluded any reference to what was likely a considerably more complex and perhaps even threatening contemporary Ireland, and certainly made no admission of any incipient gaelicization -- despite Maurice's nickname *Osseriath*. Nor is there much overt recognition of the fully documented past of the host country and its people, although this may have been an important factor in the genesis of the chronicle. Although the tightly knit Norman fiefs, generally on the most arable land, were as larger units rather randomly scattered among Irish holdings, there is no recognition that a large portion of Ireland was still not effectively administered through Anglo-Norman procedures; in other words, not fully conquered. Possible contemporary problems with Dublin, Winchester, or Windsor are no more reflected in the poem than Strongbow's initial problems with Henry II. Instead, there is family history and heroic escapist literature all in one, in versified form to be read

aloud. The circumstances of such a reading are, regrettably, beyond our recall. There are specific military events but little in the way of individualized characters. From a later perspective, although written in 1225 at the earliest, the work seems as close to the events it recounts as Giraldus' work of 1189, based on his stay in Ireland in 1183 and 1185-86. But it is resolutely in the past tense, not in a mimetic present.<sup>27</sup> The dynamics are the simple ones of military alliance and conquest, not the compromises of administration in a two-tiered state rendered more instable by a constant influx of ambitious newcomers and a gradual exclusion of the native Irish, e.g., from higher ecclesiastical office or the full coverage of English law. But by 1290 the flood of Norman activity would be over, and the ebb would have set in.

Warren has suggested of Gaelic Ireland that "society's strength lay in a generally diffused body of social customs and laws enforced entirely within the context of closely integrated neighbourhood units" (p. 5). Since military entrepreneurship, if, originally, not outright territorial conquest, was allowed, the homogeneous social order was a major source of stability and security. This society perforce remained static until touched by a society that accepted change as an inevitable ingredient in life. When, as a result of the Viking raids and later Anglo-Norman invasion, this change was inevitable, there was a surge of antiquarian interest that resulted in the great twelfth-century compilations of Irish literature and lore. Perhaps the most telling quality of the Anglo-Norman chronicle as concerns perceptions of change is its disregard for the political and social evolution of early thirteenth-century Ireland, while it concentrated, quite successfully through adherence to its principles of historiographical relevance, on the "origin story" of the Norman-Irish state, the fundamental change of 1169.<sup>28</sup> Although it would be an exaggeration to say that the Prendergasts were, like so many who followed them, already becoming "more Irish than the Irish themselves," we do find a clear example from an important immigrant group in Ireland of the world view that Frank O'Connor has so fruitfully explored as "the backward look."<sup>29</sup>

## NOTES

\*This article is the adaptation of a paper presented at the Eighth Mediaeval Colloquium, "Perceptions of Change," held in February, 1985 at Scarborough College of the University of Toronto.

<sup>1</sup> The Irish annals, by their capsule-like, year-at-a-time nature, cannot provide an adequate overview. Indeed, it is one of the many ironies of Hiberno-British relations that an event which has since proved an ineradicable point of historical reference should have gone largely unremarked by the entries for 1169. In an Ireland plagued by internecine struggle and endemic tribal warfare since the destabilizing Norse raids, the appearance of the "grey foreigners," ostensibly as allies in the service of a provincial Irish king, was not more noteworthy than the re-alignment of the Hiberno-Norse of the coastal towns and their occasional Hebridean and Manx allies with other shifts on the chequered Irish political scene. As an exception, Fragment I of the *Miscellaneous Irish Annals A.D. 1147-1437*, ed. Séamus Ó hInnse (Dublin 1947), does provide a fairly full account of early Anglo-Norman activity in Ireland.

<sup>2</sup> An edition of the French text is given by Frederic Madden in *Archaeologia* 22 (1829) 307-22. Samples from an English translation can be found in J.F. Lydon, "The Medieval English Colony" in *The Course of Irish History*, eds. T.W. Moody and F.X. Martin (2nd ed., Cork 1984) 148 f.

<sup>3</sup> *The Song of Dermot and the Earl*, ed. and trans. Goddard H. Orpen (Oxford 1892); *Ireland Under the Normans*, 4 vols. (London 1911-20).

<sup>4</sup> M. Domenica Legge, *Anglo-Norman Literature and its Background* (Oxford 1963) 303. Other references to or critical study of the chronicle will be found in the following chronological listing: reviews of Orpen's edition by Paul Meyer, *Romania* 21 (1892) 444-51, and by Felix Liebermann, *English Historical Review* 8 (1893) 129-33; J.F. O'Doherty, "Historical Criticism of *The Song of Dermot and the Earl*," *Irish Historical Review* 1 (1938) 4-10, and M.J. de C. Dodds, *ibid.* 244-46; St. John D. Seymour, *Anglo-Irish Literature 1200-1582* (Cambridge 1929) 14-21; F.X. Martin,

"The Normans: Arrival and Settlement, 1169--c. 1300," in *The Course of Irish History* (at n. 2) 123-43; William Sayers, "The Patronage of *La Conquête d'Irlande*," *Romance Philology* 21 (1967) 34-41; Alexander Bell, "Notes on 'The Song of Dermot and the Earl'," *Modern Language Review* 68 (1973) 283-91; Joseph Long, "Dermot and the Earl: Who Wrote the Song?" *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 75 C (1975) 263-72; see, too, n. 5

<sup>5</sup> *Expugnatio hibernica*, ed. and trans. A.B. Scott and F.X. Martin (Dublin 1978).

<sup>6</sup> See Sayers (at n. 4). Earl Richard's daughter, Isabel de Clare, married William the Marshal, and their son, William, sponsored the versified biography of his father; *Histoire de Guillaume le Maréchal, comte de Striguil et de Pembroke, régent d'Angleterre de 1216-1219*, ed. Paul Meyer, Société de l'Histoire de France, 3 vols. (Paris 1891-1901). Coincidentally, the town of New Ross, which celebrated its new fortifications in verse, was founded by Isabel de Clare.

<sup>7</sup> *Expugnatio*, I.3. Giraldus may have had some bias against the Flemish colony in Wales, from which Prendergast was drawn, as a result of difficulties in collecting church tithes; *Expugnatio*, xiii. *The Song* should not, however, be viewed as any systematic attempt to refute the *Expugnatio*.

<sup>8</sup> Useful overviews of these events are offered in the following: Michael Dolley, *Anglo-Norman Ireland, c. 1100-1318* (Dublin 1972); Martin (at n. 4); Donncha Ó Corráin, *Ireland Before the Normans* (Dublin 1972); A.J. Otway-Ruthven, "The Character of Anglo-Norman Settlement in Ireland," *Historical Studies: Papers Read Before the Irish Conference of Historians* 5 (1965) 75-84; Maurice Sheehy, *When the Normans Came to Ireland* (Cork and Dublin 1975); Wilfrid L. Warren, "The Interpretation of Twelfth Century Irish History," *Historical Studies* 7 (1969) 1-19. For more recent considerations, see the articles in *The English in Medieval Ireland: Proceedings of the First Joint Meeting of the Royal Irish Academy and the British Academy, Dublin, 1982*, ed. James Lydon (Dublin 1984).

<sup>9</sup> Diarmait's aspirations may well have been to move toward a more centralized state on continental models, and this would account for his unsympathetic treatment by the conservative monastic annalists.

<sup>10</sup> This sense of community is most evident in the poem on the construction of fortifications at New Ross, where the town council and



various guilds, rather than any magnate, are the decision-makers and the executors of the plan where each contingent spent an allotted day on the project.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. *Expugnatio*, II.11.

<sup>12</sup> Vv.1843 f., *Un arcevesque unt anvéé, Que seint laurence pus ert clamé*, have been taken as indicative of a date of composition after 1225, the year of O'Toole's canonization. But this could easily have been a later copyist's amendment to a line *Que othothil laurence ert clamé*. Philip de Prendergast was certainly in a position to have commissioned the chronicle earlier; see Sayers (at n. 4) 36.

<sup>13</sup> While a detailed comparison of narrative style and ideology is beyond the scope of this article, the vernacular French chronicle was by 1225 a well established literary *genre*, with stylistic origins in the epic, translations from Latin and the romance, but was quite distinct from the *chanson de geste*, despite the earlier cited comment by Giraldus' latest editors. See Diana Tyson, "Patronage of French Vernacular History Writers in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Century," *Romania* 100 (1979) 180-222.

<sup>14</sup> Long (at n. 4) is the most recent to attempt to solve the problems posed by the incomplete preface and its references to sources. Given the chronicle's penchant for retelling key material a second or third time, Long's hypothesis of a single oral source, Maurice Regan, Diarmait's interpreter and later perhaps in Richard's service, is quite plausible, if we bear in mind complementary oral traditions from the de Quency and Prendergast families.

<sup>15</sup> See Sheehy (at n. 8) 54 ff., and Warren (at n. 8).

<sup>16</sup> *Expugnatio*, notes 157-59.

<sup>17</sup> *Topographia Hibernica*, ed. John J. O'Meara, *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 52 C (1949), 113-78; trans. O'Meara as *The History and Topography of Ireland* (Harmondsworth 1982).

<sup>18</sup> This was Murchad Ua Brain (O Byrne?), a persistent thorn in Diarmait's side. The humiliation which Diarmait suffered at his hands when he approached him for aid may account for this gory and specific detail on his death; see notes 8 and 132 to the *Expugnatio*.

<sup>19</sup> "The Destruction of Dind Rig," ed. and trans. Whitley Stokes, *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie* 3 (1899) 1-14, 225.

<sup>20</sup> On the development of OFr. *Uluestre* and Eng. *Ulster* from a Norse

compound with OIr. *Ulad* "Ulster, Ulstermen" + the Norse gen. sg. ending -s- + OIr. *tír* "land," whence Hiberno-Norse *Ulaztír*, see Alf Sommerfelt, "The English Form of the Names of the Main Provinces of Ireland,"

*Lochlann* 1 (1938) 223-27.

<sup>21</sup> See Otway-Ruthven (at n. 8).

<sup>22</sup> For a review of a very different development in Scotland, see Edward J. Cowan, "Myth and Identity in Early Medieval Scotland," *Scottish Historical Review* 63 (1984) 111-35, esp. 130.

<sup>23</sup> Sheehy (at n. 8) 21 f.

<sup>24</sup> See, too, Pròinsias Mac Cana, "Notes on the Early Irish Concept of Unity," *The Crane Bag* 2 (1978) 57-71.

<sup>25</sup> Giraldus makes an early and unquestionably subjective but none the less eloquent statement of how the Geraldines were in demand in times of war but passed over in times of peace (II.5). Best known, perhaps, is his prescient remark, valid for successive generations of English in Ireland: *sicut Hibernicis Anglis, sic et Anglis Hibernici simus*: "just as we are English as far as the Irish are concerned, likewise to the English we are Irish" (II.23).

<sup>26</sup> For a rare exception, see vv. 1959 f.: *Cum deo volait, a cele feis, Remist le champ a nos engleis*.

<sup>27</sup> See Rupert T. Pickens, "Historical Consciousness in Old French Narrative," *French Forum* 4 (1979) 168-84.

<sup>28</sup> Considering Giraldus' loose chronological framework and his inclusion, for example, of ecclesiastical politics, references to Barbarossa's crusade and his own taking of the cross, theories on how to subjugate the Irish, and eulogy of Henry II, one may claim the vernacular chronicler, despite his lack of absolute dates, to have had the more rigorous historiographical method. In this he was no doubt aided by his more narrowly defined audience. It will be of interest to see whether his present editors concur with this judgment.

<sup>29</sup> Frank O'Connor, *The Backward Look* (London 1967).