

‘Death and Renewal’: Translating Old Irish Texts in Nineteenth-Century Ireland

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Abstract:

This article investigates the conflicted cultural identity of those nineteenth-century Irish-speaking antiquarians working on translations of Old Irish texts. Giving voice to the translators, this article will show how they were frustrated in attempts to turn their own knowledge into authority by being members of the Catholic Gaelic Irish in a country dominated by the Protestant Ascendancy. It will examine contemporaneous writings and correspondence to reveal how the translators felt about being accused of complicity in the Anglicisation of Ireland’s literary heritage, in the erasure of their own language, and traditions, by means of their translations into English for the Anglophone world.

Keywords: antiquarianism, Ascendancy, O’Curry, O’Donovan, translation

Whilst Gaelic Irish society has always valued the transmission of older Irish texts, interest by English-speakers was only really shown in the late eighteenth century. Some interest had been shown earlier by English-speaking antiquarians, such as James Ussher, Sir James Ware, Charles Vallancey and Edward Ledwich, some of whom had used *amanuenses* to translate the materials for their own research, but interest by the general public was only shown after the so-called “Ossian controversy” of the 1760s. The “Ossian controversy” was the unmasking of James MacPherson’s compositions centred on the character of Ossian, which he had attempted to pass off as translations (Leerssen 1996b, 40). What the compositions and, indeed, the controversy itself succeeded in doing was to garner public interest in all things ‘Celtic’ and to create a dichotomy which would last throughout the nineteenth century in Ireland, that is to say, Celtic or Gaelic versus Anglo-Saxon or Ascendancy. Naturally, the interest in all things Celtic, inspired by the Ossian poems meant that there was interest in Ireland’s Celtic past as well. Charlotte Brooke’s *Reliques of Irish Poetry*, published 1789, helped to introduce the general public to some of the Irish material which dealt with Oisín and to a literary tradition unfamiliar

to most. She writes that “the British muse is not yet informed that she has an elder sister in this isle [...]” (Brooke 2009, vii). This interest helped to discard some of the associations of barbarity that were associated with the Celts and also helped Anglo-Irish Ascendancy forge a link between their position as being neither completely Irish, nor completely English, and the country they called home; Ireland. Brooke writes about this in her introduction to *Reliques*, stating that:

[...] let them [the British and Irish muses] tell her [Britain], that the portion of her blood which flows in our veins is rather ennobled than disgraced by the mingling tides that descended from our ancestors. (Brooke 2009, viii)

This notion of unity with Ireland had become important to the Anglo-Irish in the late eighteenth century and continued and developed further throughout the nineteenth. Joep Leerssen writes:

In all these new manifestations of Ireland’s national conflict, one trend had however been firmly fixed in the course of the eighteenth century, and was to remain an operative force in later ideological developments: the implicit notion that Ireland was fundamentally a Gaelic country, that the true Ireland looked back to a Gaelic past, and that the presence of English-derived culture within the Irish shores was a matter of cultural adulteration. Irish nationalists, though usually belonging to an urban, English-speaking middle class or upper middle class, were to refer to native, Gaelic culture and to native Gaelic antiquity in the first person, as something to identify with, while seeing England as an alien, foreign country. [...] The adoption and central canonization of a Gaelic cultural affiliation and a Gaelic-oriented historical self-awareness had been a slow and complex process, finally accomplished in the later eighteenth century; it was to remain central to the Anglo-Irish sense of national identity henceforth. In the various ethnic and cultural images and identity-constructs of Irishness which had been formulated over the centuries, the one which had finally gained pride of place was that of a fundamental, essential and intransigent non-Englishness. (Leerssen 1996a, 376)

With this amount of interest being shown in Gaelic Ireland and with the underlying notion that literature in Irish from this ‘Gaelic past’ was somehow truer, it is somewhat understandable that so much attention would be paid to Old Irish literature in the nineteenth century and that many would want to take part in bringing it to a wider audience of ‘fellow Irishmen’ amongst the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy and to an interested audience in Britain and other countries as well.

As in previous centuries, the translations were made almost exclusively by Gaelic scholars, though there were some from the Ascendancy who worked on translations as well. These Ascendancy scholars, however, were few in number and arguably limited to the Reverend James Henthorn Todd, who had learnt Irish and was able to translate himself from Old Irish into English, and to

Sir William Reeves, Bishop of Down and Connor, who had a great interest in the archaeology of ancient Ireland and in 1847 had translated *The Life of St Columba, Founder of Hy; Written by Adamnan, Ninth Abbot of that Monastery*, which was written in Latin. For translations from Old or Middle Irish to English, though, Reeves was dependent on John O'Donovan, as shown by their correspondence¹. John O'Donovan and his sometime colleague and later brother-in-law, Eugene O'Curry, were arguably the greatest and most prolific scholars of Irish in the nineteenth century and they are responsible for an exceptionally large number of transcriptions and translations of Old Irish manuscripts. Because of this, a large portion of this article will be focused on them, as well as for the fact that they were both native Irish speakers, whose work almost solely involved them in translating for largely Anglophone audiences through large-scale antiquarian translation projects led by Anglo-Irish steering committees. It is through possibly the greatest Anglo-Irish led translation project that both O'Donovan and O'Curry came to prominence as Irish scholars. They both had worked for the topographical department of the Ordnance Survey of Ireland (also referred to as the historical department), which was founded in the early 1830s (Doherty 2006, 19-20) to assist the military to better follow Thomas Larcom's instruction number thirty three "that the persons employed on the survey are to endeavour to obtain the correct orthography of the names of places by diligently consulting the best authorities within their reach" (cited in Andrews 2006, 311). After the military proved not to be suited to this task, O'Donovan was brought in to replace another scholar, Edward O'Reilly, who had died (Ó Muraíle 1997, 15) and O'Curry later joined. The way it worked was thus: O'Donovan had spent years researching placenames in printed and manuscript sources in Dublin and then, after realising that field staff were of little use to him in collecting contemporary orthography due to their ignorance of the Irish language, he went into the country himself to collect placenames (Doherty 2006, 20). After O'Curry joined the topographical department, he acted as O'Donovan's cross-referencer in Dublin, although he himself was active in the field between 1837 and 1839 (Ó Madagáin 2008, 430; Doherty 2006, 20). O'Donovan, whilst out on the road, would send back letters a few times a week to Dublin, which contained all the information he had gathered about placenames from both locals and manuscripts in private collections, as well as information about historical and antiquarian sites he had come across on his way. George Petrie, O'Curry and the others involved in the topographical department used these letters for their own antiquarian researches; O'Curry cross-referenced the information in the missives with manuscripts in Dublin libraries and other Dublin based institutions. Although Anglo-Irish scholars had been aware of the value of native scholars for a while, it was the big projects, such as the Ordnance Survey, which really highlighted how much they needed their help with regard to translations. Though some placenames were transliterated by the

topographical department of the Ordnance Survey, many were translated and with Colby's instruction to consult "the best authorities within their reach," it is evident that scholars of the capability of O'Donovan and O'Curry had to be involved. Joep Leerssen writes about their involvement, stating that:

The troika of Petrie, O'Donovan and O'Curry has often been celebrated as the rescue team of Irish antiquarianism, the men who set the investigation of Gaelic antiquity on a new, scientific and critical footing, and whose enormous labours laid the groundwork for all subsequent work in the field. At the same time it is important to realize that this work was undertaken for, and for more than ten years largely funded by, the Ordnance Survey project as it was expanding under Larcom's inspired direction. It is all the more important to stress this, since the Ordnance Survey has been heavily distorted in Brian Friel's widely successful play *Translations*. Friel presents the Ordnance Survey as a blunt colonial instrument in the hands of the imperial forces, inflicting cultural self-estrangement on native Ireland by means of billeting English soldiers in rural villages, and imposing uncomprehending and ugly anglicizations of native placenames under threat of eviction. In fact, the very opposite was the case. Although triangulation and measurements may have been undertaken by soldiers, the fieldworkers sent out to inventorize placenames, architectural remains and other cultural artefacts were men like O'Donovan and O'Curry, with a good knowledge of, and a sympathetic interest in, local antiques and native lore, foreshadowing later folklore commissioners, salvaging the original placenames from neglect or corruption by painstaking inventorization of manuscripts, giving them English transliterations rather than translations, and capturing a great deal of local lore and learning from communities which would fifteen years later be swept away by the Famine. If, today, the Gaelic substratum of Irish culture is most prominently visible in the placenames and the landscape, then that presence is owing to a large degree to the work of the Ordnance Survey of 1824-1841. We may go even further and say that the Ordnance Survey was a major contribution to the cultural nationalism of later decades, in that it equated the very land itself with a Gaelic past and a Gaelic-speaking peasantry, thus canonizing the Gaelic tradition as the very bedrock, the cultural ground under the feet of modern Ireland, making Gaelic culture literally aboriginal and autochthonous to Ireland, a native fruit of its very soil. The Ordnance Survey turned the entire countryside of Ireland into one vast *lieu de mémoire*: topography became replete with historical and mythological overtones, while history and myth became specific and graspable in their topographical locale. (Leerssen 2006b, 102-103)

This was the first Anglo-Irish led project that O'Donovan and O'Curry had worked on, aside from some cataloguing work of manuscripts for Todd. It could be argued that it was more of an Anglo led project than an Anglo-Irish one, but their Anglo-Irish supervisors had more of an impact on their work, in particular Sir Thomas Larcom, the departmental leader, an Anglo-Irish and exemplary of the type of Ascendancy figure, who had a great interest in Irish history and language and their immediate supervisors, and the scholar George Petrie, who was neither Anglo-Irish nor Gaelic Irish. O'Donovan's and O'Curry's involvement with the Ordnance Survey would set the para-

digm for the rest of their lives as they moved from one project to another, even publishing their own research, mainly in the form of translations, in Anglo-Irish run journals.

John O'Donovan spent the years 1848-1851 working on, amongst other things, an edition and translation of *The Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland by the Four Masters* or the *Annals of the Four Masters* (hereafter quoted as *AFM*), as they are commonly referred to. It might be assumed that, as he was working independently on this and not as a translator of someone else's edition, he made the decisions regarding the publication. This, however, was not the case. As with his work on the Ordnance Survey of Ireland, O'Donovan carried out vast amounts of work, but the final say was made by somebody else. In the "Introductory Remarks" to the first volume, O'Donovan describes how J.H. Todd made several changes to his original plan for the work, maintaining that "the Editor first stated his own opinion as to the mode of printing the original and translation, but finally submitted to the following rules, which were committed to writing by the Rev. Dr. Todd" (O'Donovan 1856, xxxix). He goes on to lay down the rules, which are mainly to do with punctuation, but also, as O'Donovan was working from two autographed copies of *AFM*, to do with discrepancies between the manuscripts themselves. O'Donovan states, on page xxxviii, that he had asked the publishers to check with the scholars, whose opinions he valued, which seems to be indicative of the lack of power that he felt he had. When one is doing an edition of a text, normally the decision about punctuation and the like resides with the editor; however in this case, it did not.

Perhaps the best example of how the Gaelic Irish scholars were seen as merely translators and the extent to which they were in the hands of steering committees is the Brehon Law Commission. The first meeting of the Commission for the publication of the ancient laws and institutes of Ireland was held on 7th December 1852 and the members were:

Dr. James Henthorn Todd, Dr. Charles Graves, Dr. George Petrie, Sir Thomas Larcom, Chief Baron David Pigot, Lord Chancellor Francis Blackburne, Lord Monteagle, Sir Joseph Napier, the Earl of Dunraven, the Earl of Ross, Lord Talbot de Malahide, and Rev. Dr. Thomas Romney Robinson. (Boyne 1987, 99)

In the words of one commentator, "Of the twelve, two were Catholics, a few were Irish scholars but not Irish speakers; none had the tradition of Gaelic culture inherent in both O'Curry and O'Donovan" (Boyne 1987, 99). This, naturally, led to problems. At the first meeting, O'Donovan was appointed editor, over his colleague O'Curry, who, as might be expected, was not happy with this arrangement (*Minutes of First Meeting of Commissioners* dated 7th December 1852). The steering committee's rationale for this act was that O'Donovan was considered a classical scholar and legal expert, whereas O'Curry was not (Boyne 1987, 99). And it is this importance of education which is the crux of the matter of why Gaelic scholars were only ever merely

translators or editors under large Ascendancy-dominated steering committees. The work on the *Ancient Laws and Institutes of Ireland* (hereafter referred to as *ALI*) was immense. After the preliminary translations of their transcriptions, which took five years to do, O'Donovan ended up with twelve volumes; O'Curry with thirteen (Boyne 1987, 100). This, however, was of little consequence to the Treasury, who had funded the project, and they began putting pressure on the editors to speed things up, due to the great costs involved. They had also decided that the delay was due to "an indifferent command of the English language on the part of the editors" (Boyne 1987, 100) and, as such, in 1860, a parliamentary order was issued to have the Commission appoint an editor skilled in ancient law and legal terminology. This order removed O'Donovan – an expert linguist and trained lawyer –, and O'Curry, the most skilled scholar of his day in the interpretation of old Irish manuscripts. They were replaced with a Professor of Jurisprudence at Queen's College, Belfast, William Neilson Hancock, and his assistant, Thomas Busted, who could not speak, read, or write Irish (Boyne 1987, 100). O'Donovan died towards the end of the following year, O'Curry the year after, leaving the *ALI* nowhere near completion.

It is only the education of Hancock and Busted which made them suitable in the eyes of the steering committee to carry out this task. As already shown, they had none of the linguistic capability of either O'Donovan or O'Curry, nor the familiarity with the manuscript tradition. What they did possess was English as a mother tongue and a university education. As Catholics, O'Donovan and O'Curry were denied a university education. The Catholic University was founded in 1851 and it is unlikely that they ever would have been educated at Trinity College, Dublin. Despite this, they did both work as university lecturers: O'Donovan at Queen's University, Belfast and O'Curry at the Catholic University. To their Anglo-Irish Ascendancy project overseers, this did not seem to matter.

The projects outlined above were the largest that the pair of them were involved in, though they had also published articles and books. These journals were in affiliation with archaeological or Celtic societies, which had, for the most part, been founded by members of the Ascendancy and were still run by them. The books published were mainly about manuscript sources for early Irish history, for example O'Curry's *On the Manners and Customs of the Ancient Irish*, based on a series of lectures and published posthumously in 1873, which also contained some translations of manuscripts.

It might not be such a surprise that the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy was in such control of the antiquarian translation projects, given that its members were the intended market for the resulting translations. What has to be remembered is that the original texts from which the translations were made were not just written in a language that was not spoken by those in power in nineteenth-century Ireland, but that they were written in a language that had

not been spoken since the ninth century, in the case of Old Irish, and since the twelfth century, in the case of Middle Irish. Though the Gaelic Revival inspired people to learn Modern Irish at the end of the nineteenth century, the late eighteenth-century Celtic Revival did no such thing. In any case, given the difficulties with the older forms of the language that the so-called experts encountered, it is extraordinarily unlikely that the general populace could ever have managed to learn Old or Middle Irish. One of the criticisms levelled at O'Donovan and O'Curry regarding their work on the Brehon laws was that their knowledge of Old and Middle Irish was based on a sound knowledge of Modern Irish (Boyne 1987, 100) coupled with a familiarity of old manuscripts. It is also worth pointing out that these were the early days of Celtic philology – the first printed grammar to treat of Old Irish, Zeuss's *Grammatica Celtica*, did not appear until 1853 – and a more scientific study of the language would not appear until a little later in the century. There was a dichotomy present in the study of Celtic philology around the middle of the nineteenth century, which could help explain why the Gaelic Irish scholars were regarded as being fit solely for translation and not as capable of supervising their own projects. The Celtic scholarly community, as Seán Ó Lúing writes, was divided into two methods of study – continental philological scholarship, with a purported emphasis on accuracy and scientific method, versus native learning, which sought to apply native knowledge to the study and interpretation of the older language (Ó Lúing 2000, 44). "Native learning" here encompasses *senchas*, what F. J. Byrne and others term the "Gaelic historical tradition" (Byrne 1974). Many scholars who favoured philological scholarship looked down on the native scholars, who did not possess, according to them, the scientific skills necessary to properly study the language. One such scholar was the late nineteenth-century antiquarian Whitley Stokes, who was a champion of continental philological scholarship. In an argument with Standish Hayes O'Grady he claimed that "two German professors [Windisch and Zimmer] had, in the previous thirty five years, done more for the knowledge of Irish 'than all the native scholars of Irish that have ever lived'" (*The Academy*, 6 April 1889 cited in Ó Lúing 2000, 45). With so much controversy surrounding the study of Old Irish texts, it is clear that the only way to convey them to the populace was to translate them into English. Very few Ascendancy members went to the trouble of learning Irish, and those that did are normally numbered amongst those with an academic interest, which only left English.

Working surrounded by Anglophones, supervised (for the most part) by Anglophones, and, most definitely, for Anglophones, meant that O'Donovan and O'Curry were only left to use their mother tongue in their own homes and possibly to each other in private. In addition to this, they faced criticism from those fellow antiquarians who considered them to be lesser scholars, as they had not learnt Old Irish, but were basing their knowledge on their

knowledge of their native tongue. For O'Donovan, certainly, and possibly for O'Curry as well, though no written evidence of this has emerged as of yet, this most definitely had an effect on the way he viewed the modern form of the language. Despite working nearly solely on the older forms of the language, he nevertheless had enough of an interest in the modern form to publish *A Grammar of the Irish Language* in 1845. From the size of it and the types of examples given, it was not likely in his eyes to be seen to be a useful tool for learners. It seems to be more of a relic of the language captured at a moment in time and this feeling is increased when looking at the examples of Irish writings given in an appendix, which do not date any later than the seventeenth century (O'Donovan 1845, Appendix II). O'Donovan certainly never saw his grammar as anything other than a record of the language as spoken with no future ahead of it. In a letter to Reeves in 1845, he writes that, "my grammar is published but I have not yet seen it. I fear that very few will buy it. It is too heavy a work for any but antiquaries; it will remain as a monument of the language and I trust the preface or introduction to it will teach future Irish scholars to be less wild and extravagant in their notions" (26 July 1845 IE/UCD/SC/JO'D/5). He continues to reveal his worries about the language and society in his letters to Reeves, saying:

I fear the Gaelic world is likely to die of sheer *inanitation*. Societies gone to pot! No chance of any more works for us as I understand. The failure of the potatoes and the fear of Mitchel have among the *Gaedhil* frightened literature of existence. Mr Mac Donnell's sporting his way among genteel circles and seems to forget his Gaelic ancestors. He makes me a visit now about once a month to talk about the progress now making by democracy, and to what I am doing!! I am getting on steadily with the first part of the Four Masters, and hope to be out in November, but I fear the feeling for such studies is dying out by re-action. I always believed this would be the case, but I worked away reckless of consequences. I shall then have to decide on what to do with myself. It would have been better for me that the Archaeological Society never existed, and as for the Celtic I never had any hope in that or its originators, so that my connection with it was merely accidental. I am puzzled to determine on what I had better do. Ferguson's last Review of the Annals deals with me in such a way that I may be set down as a politician, which is not very fair as I have avoided politics all my life. Ferguson's praise and dispraise appear to me rather strong in a philosopher. He evidently despises the subject, but wishes to turn it to account in the present line of politics which he has adopted and this will not do me much service. (13 May 1848 IE/UCD/SC/JO'D/32)²

One wonders if O'Donovan felt anything like guilt for what could potentially be seen as his help in eradicating the Gaelic world, which had raised him and brought him to prominence with his knowledge of it. His and O'Curry's contributions to finding, collating, and transcribing manuscripts is widely recognised by Celtic scholars today, who freely acknowledge the debt they owe to their forerunners in the field³, yet his work lay in solely in the realm of

English. He did not add anything new to the literature of the Gaelic world, though his contributions for others to study it and to increase on the knowledge of it at a later date were vast and their importance cannot be understated. Perhaps he thought that his contributions would inspire greater numbers of people to learn the older form of the language or to show an interest in the modern form, but in this, he was disappointed. As stated already, the Celtic Revival did not inspire people linguistically the way that the Gaelic Revival did. It could be assumed, however, that O'Donovan was grateful for the few who did show an interest in early Irish history and its literature, even if they did have to read it in translation. In a letter to Reeves, he writes:

England will never foster anything relating to Irish literatures. Her object has been, and will be to obliterate all monuments of the Scots [he writes in brackets above this *omnia monumentia scotorum*], but individuals of the Teutonic race have now done too much to keep it in the power of any people to obliterate these monuments. Ussher, Ware, Lombard, Petrie, Reeves have, by individual exertion, contributed to keep alive the memory of a race which the English government would wish to obliterate. By further working in the same field you may earn fame and honour amid posterity; but this is an age of turbulence, which will not appreciate the labours of any truth-loving historian or antiquary. Ledwich had his day; he connected his speculations with the politics and prejudices of his class, write much truth, but distorted many facts, and exhibited such a malignant spirit towards the race whose history he attempted to illustrate, that his real character was discovered by the next generation, and all his distortions have been carefully examined, exposed by the learned and honest Lanigan and by the truth-loving Petrie, and condemned. This fate he deserved!!! Ussher, Ware, Colgan, O'Flaherty, Petrie & Reeves, will be the same to every generation, because they investigated the naked truth apart from national prejudices or *race*. Prejudices. (14 July 1848 IE/UCD/SC/JO'D/33)⁴

O'Donovan, and perhaps O'Curry as well, may have felt trapped in a juxtaposition of translating the literature of their country, written in their mother tongue, albeit an older and obsolete form, into English for people whom had no desire to learn for themselves, and the majority of who were merely following a fad in the fashion of Celticity, whilst watching the modern form of their language slowly die out around them, but it need not have been a completely uncomfortable situation for them. Just as O'Donovan had seen a decline, in standard if not in fashion, in antiquarian research at the end of the eighteenth and in the first decade of the nineteenth century, only for it to be a renaissance in both standard and desire in the early to mid-nineteenth, perhaps he felt that way about the language itself. He had witnessed the first philological work to deal with the Celtic languages, Zeuss's *Grammatica Celtica*, be published in 1853; he had seen the first continental scholars start to work on Old Irish, which he must have seen as a good thing, even if it did lead to criticism of his own standard being levelled at him; and he had started to see the flourishes of what could possibly lead to a renewed interest

in the Irish language start under the auspices of the beginnings of the Cultural Nationalism movement, after the *Nation* newspaper began publishing articles praising the worth of the modern Irish language and beginning its intrinsic link to Irishness. Yes, O'Donovan did write about how he saw Gaelic society having no future, yet the same was said after the Flight of the Earls in the seventeenth century. That society was on a wane, but did not die out completely. It is not completely unlikely that O'Donovan, and possibly O'Curry, and even the other antiquarians who were able to translate from Old Irish, lived in hope of this happening again and knowing that they had played a part in preserving the manuscripts, especially in the bi-lingual editions, for future generations. Even if all the general public wanted was translations, a demand had been created for knowledge, which in turn created a demand for translators with the knowledge of these manuscripts and the linguistic capability to translate them.

Notes

¹ Held in University College, Dublin, IE/UCD/SC/JO'D.

² Underlined emphasis is O'Donovan's own. Ferguson here refers to the antiquarian and poet Samuel Ferguson, who, along with some articles antiquarian in nature, wrote poems based on early Irish history. He was, what could be termed, a 'Nationalist-Unionist', in that he was a staunch Unionist who believed that it was in Ireland's best interest as a nation to remain unified with Britain. This, however, as with many other Nationalist-Unionists, such as the antiquarian William Wilde, did not diminish his sense of patriotism. He, and many others like him, would have been typical readers of the translations made by O'Donovan and O'Curry and others.

³ For example, D.A. Binchy's assessment of their work done on early Irish law in his own *magnum opus*, *Corpus Iuris Hibernici* (1978). He writes: "It only remains for me to pay tribute to the great scholars of the past who have paved the way for me and laid me under such heavy obligations. First and foremost those gallant pioneers O'Curry and O'Donovan. Without seventeen volumes of their [...] transcripts, [...] I should never have undertaken a task of this magnitude, and without their aid I should have been quite unable to read several lines of the manuscripts which have become almost illegible in the interval [...] Their exceptionally wide acquaintance with all other branches of literature enabled them to make their way through the labyrinth of legal manuscripts with a degree of success which is all the more remarkable when we remember that the scientific study of the older language had hardly begun in their lifetime [...] The translations by them, which afterwards appeared [...] in the ill-starred 'official' edition, are reasonably accurate so far as the later material is concerned, but the crabbed and cryptic language of the text often baffled them. In the circumstances they did the best they could: they translated it as the glossators had 'explained' it, in the belief (or perhaps just the hope) that these later custodians of the 'sacred' text knew its meaning. For this oversight it would be most unfair to blame them: they were confronted with a language which was an uncharted sea and which even today, after more than a century of strenuous research, is still far from fully explored. Besides, death claimed both of them before they could undertake a comparative study of the numerous manuscripts they had transcribed and translated in isolation. Had they been granted a longer span, many of the worst blunders in the English version of the *Ancient Laws of Ireland* would undoubtedly have been avoided" (vol I, xvii).

⁴ Underlined emphasis is O'Donovan's. Ledwich was an Anglo-Irish antiquarian, mainly writing in the late eighteenth century. He wrote a general history of Ireland, which equated some Irish practices, such as Brehon law, with barbarism.

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