

The Tripartite Life of Whitley Stokes (1830–1909)

Elizabeth Boyle & Paul Russell

EDITORS



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‘Their harmless calling’: Whitley Stokes and the Irish linguistic tradition

PÁDRAIC MORAN

In his ‘Bibliography of the publications of Whitley Stokes’, R.I. Best remarked that Stokes ‘was present, one might say, at the birth of Celtic philology, when the immortal *Grammatica Celtica* appeared’.¹ Johann Kaspar Zeuss (1806–56) had published this ground-breaking work in 1853,² providing the first modern grammar of Old Irish within the new framework of Indo-European comparative philology. At the time of its publication, Stokes’ reviews and translations of Danish and Serbian ballads had already begun to appear, and within a few years he would publish his first works in Celtic Studies.³ Two letters from John O’Donovan to William Reeves in 1857/8 reveal a scholar in formation, fully committed to Zeuss’ work, and clearly making a very strong impression on his seniors:

Young Stokes will be a wonderful linguist if he lives to mature his knowledge. At present he is rather *hasty* in forming theories and rejecting them again without ceremony. He thinks that he ought to reduce all the Irish fragments we have remaining to the old Irish spelling and to print them in this spelling; but *in this* I disagree with him *toto coelo!!* We could very easily reduce the orthography to the standard of the Zeussian glosses, but I hold that this would not be fair or antiquarian like ...⁴

I am getting gradually out of the *public* business of topography into the more *private* huxtery of philology; but I fear that the latter though

¹ R.I. Best, ‘Bibliography of the publications of Whitley Stokes’, *ZCP*, 8 (1912), 351–406 at 352.
² Johann Kasper Zeuss, *Grammatica celtica: e monumentis vetustis tam hibernicae linguae quam britannicae dialecti* ... (Leipzig, 1853; 2nd ed. Berlin, 1871).
³ Beginning with an unsigned review of William Reeves (ed.), *The life of St Columba, founder of Hy* (Dublin, 1857): ‘Adamnan’s life of St Columba’, *Saturday Review*, 2 (1857), 224–5. On Stokes’ work on Danish and Serbian ballads, see Elizabeth Boyle, ch. 3, this volume.
⁴ O’Donovan to Reeves, 20 Oct. 1857, John O’Donovan/William Reeves correspondence, UCD, <http://ivrlaprod.ucd.ie/fedora/get/ivrla10-:7440/ivrla10-:objLayoutDef/getLayout/> (accessed 13 Mar. 2011). I have italicized words underlined in the letters.

sounding more tame and potato-like is still more intoxicating. Zeuss is stimulating my *brains*; and the contempt with which Whitley Stokes continues to speak of all our philological exertions is rousing my *tigrine* ferocity, though the young lawyer is any thing but sound himself from his want of scientific linguistic knowledge.⁵

Stokes must have been working on his first edition of an Irish text around this time, or soon after. *Irish glosses: a medieval tract on Latin declension with examples explained in Irish* was signed by the author at his family's home in Carrig Breac, Howth, on 16 August 1858.⁶ The edition proper of this late-medieval Latin word-list,⁷ glossed in Irish, comprises just thirty-three out of 208 pages, the remainder being given over to an exhaustive philological commentary on the Irish words.⁸ Stokes' introduction reveals the outline of his earliest scholarly influences, acknowledging James Henthorne Todd, Eugene O'Curry, John O'Donovan and Rudolf Siegfried (then newly appointed professor of Sanskrit at Trinity College, Dublin).⁹ His commentary refers principally to Zeuss, Kuhn's *Zeitschrift*,¹⁰ Glück on Continental Celtic names,¹¹ and Edward O'Reilly's Irish-English dictionary.¹² The authority of O'Donovan and O'Curry was such that no references were needed other than their initials alone.¹³

The second of Stokes' editions, somewhat confusingly also titled 'Irish glosses', appeared in the same year (1860), in the *Transactions of the Philological Society* volume for 1859.¹⁴ This comprised a small number of glosses on the legal tract *Bretha Nemed Dédenech* and a longer glossary titled *Dúil Dromma Cetta*. The edition is of quite different character from his other *Irish glosses* published in the same year, having minimal editorial intervention, no commentary or trans-

5 O'Donovan to Reeves, 11 Feb. 1858, John O'Donovan/William Reeves correspondence, UCD, <http://ivrlaprod.ucd.ie/fedora/get/ivrla10-:7452/ivrla10-:objLayoutbDef/getLayout/> (accessed 13 Mar. 2011). 6 Whitley Stokes, *Irish glosses: a medieval tract on Latin declension with examples explained in Irish, to which are added the Lorica of Gildas, with the gloss thereon, and a selection of glosses from the Book of Aramgh* (Dublin, 1860). The work was awarded a gold medal from the Royal Irish Academy. 7 See, for example, the Norman names *Robertus*, *Valterus*, *Uillialmus*, *Gillialmus* ... *Gillibertus* (p. 17) and the reference to *Normanigina normanach* (p. 11). 8 Stokes' commentary often seems to have very little to do with the text at all. For example, Stokes supplied a full Old Irish paradigm for the first lemma, *filidh*, though the oblique forms do not occur in the text at all. 9 And, more curiously, another Trinity College contemporary, the Anglican controversialist R.F. Littledale (on whom see George Herring, 'Littledale, Richard Frederick (1833–1890)', *ODNB*, xxxiv, pp. 23–4, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/16778>, accessed 15 Dec. 2010). For further discussion of Siegfried, see Pól Ó Dochartaigh, ch. 2, this volume. 10 Adalbert Kuhn (ed.), *Zeitschrift zur vergleichenden Sprachforschung* (1852–74). 11 Christian Wilhelm Glück, *Die bei Cäsar vorkommenden keltischen Namen* (Munich, 1857). 12 Edward O'Reilly, *Sanas Gaoidhíle–Sags–Bhéarla, or, an Irish–English dictionary* (1817, 2nd ed. 1821). 13 Stokes also cites two Irish texts as authorities: the *Liber Hymnorum* (based on J.H. Todd's edition, *Leabhar imuinn* (Dublin, 1855)) and Cormac's glossary (see further below). 14 'Irish glosses from a MS in Trinity College, Dublin', *TPhS* (1859), 197–215.

lation, and just a few bare notes on the manuscript. Stokes is referred to as 'a member of the council', and signs his initials only. Perhaps he regarded it as a rough draft in preparation for his work to follow.

Stokes had certainly relaxed his earlier position on orthography (as criticized by O'Donovan) by 1861, when he concluded his seventy-six-page introduction to *Three Irish glossaries* (Cormac's glossary, O'Davoren's glossary and a glossary to the *Féilire Oengusso*) with the note:

In leaving these glossaries I warn the reader that the are they are merely ἐκδόσεις [publications] – the time for διορθώσεις [emendations] of Celtic texts not having, I hold, as yet arrived. We must reap and thresh before we winnow.¹⁵

However, his dedication to Zeuss remained firm, as he acknowledged

above all ... the grammar of John Caspar Zeuss, of whom Celtic philologers may well say, in the words of the Orphic poet: Ζεὺς ἀρχή – Ζεὺς μέσσα – Διὸς δ' ἐκ πάντα τέτυκται [Zeus the beginning, Zeus the middle, from Zeus all things have been made].¹⁶

The texts in these earliest editions derive from the early Irish linguistic tradition. O'Davoren's glossary and the glossary to the *Féilire Oengusso* explain difficult words in legal and poetical texts respectively, the former exemplifying these with citations. Cormac's glossary and *Dúil Dromma Cetta* are early etymological tracts, explaining the origins of Irish words with reference to Irish, Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Welsh (or Brittonic) and other languages.¹⁷ Stokes' interest in early glossaries continued throughout his career, and – even allowing for the vast extent of his bibliography – glossary editions feature prominently. He edited Cormac's glossary again in 1868 and in 1893,¹⁸ O'Davoren's glossary again in 1903–4,¹⁹

¹⁵ Whitley Stokes, *Three Irish glossaries: Cormac's glossary, codex A ..., O'Davoren's glossary ... and a glossary to the Calendar of Oingus the Culdee ... with a preface and index* (London, 1862), p. 14 (signed at Dublin, Oct. 1861). ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. lxxv. See Stefan Zimmer, 'Ζεὺς ἀρχή – Ζεὺς μέσσα – Διὸς δ' ἐκ πάντα τέτυκται "Zeus ist der Anfang, Zeus die Mitte, von Zeus ist alles bereitet." Geleitwort zur deutschen Erstveröffentlichung von Johann Kaspar Zeuß' Einleitung zu seiner *Grammatica Celtica* (1853)', forthcoming. ¹⁷ Stokes' introduction to *Three Irish glossaries* remains a very useful introduction to that text. For more recent work on the glossary tradition, see Paul Russell, 'The sounds of a silence: the growth of Cormac's glossary', *CMCS*, 15 (1988), 1–30; id., 'Dúil Dromma Cetta and Cormac's glossary', *Études celtiques*, 32 (1996), 147–74; id., 'Read it in a glossary: glossaries and learned discourse in medieval Ireland', Kathleen Hughes Memorial Lectures, 6 (Cambridge, 2008). ¹⁸ John O'Donovan (trans.) & Whitley Stokes (ed.), *Sanas Chormaic: Cormac's glossary* (Calcutta, 1868); Whitley Stokes (ed.), 'On the Bodleian fragment of Cormac's glossary', *TPhS* (1891–4), 149–206. ¹⁹ Whitley Stokes (ed.), 'O'Davoren's glossary', *ACL*, 2:3–4 (Halle, 1903–4), 197–504.

O'Mulconry's glossary,²⁰ metrical glossaries,²¹ medical glossaries,²² and the Lecan, Egerton and Stowe glossaries.²³ Nonetheless, Stokes was generally quite dismissive of their intrinsic value. Elsewhere in his introduction to *Three Irish glossaries*, he declares:

In considering the philological value of the results of Cormac's labours, I need hardly say that his derivations are generally quite as ludicrous as those of most of the other word-splitters who have pursued their harmless calling from Varro down to the predecessors of Franz Bopp.²⁴

It seems clear, then, that Stokes regarded his own work as representing a break from older linguistic traditions, both ancient and modern. So why was Stokes interested in these texts? Initially, he may have been following the example of Zeuss. Zeuss had built his meticulous linguistic analysis on a collection of Old Irish harvested largely from interlinear and marginal glosses found in Continental manuscripts, and Stokes' two 'Irish glosses' editions focused on similar types of text.²⁵ However, it seems that Stokes' main interest was lexicographical. In *Irish glosses*, he explains that:

The chief, indeed the only, value of the tract lies in the large number of Irish words (about 1,100) which are placed as glosses to the Latin vocables exemplifying different declensions. Many of these words are unregistered in our dictionaries; of others the meaning has hitherto been guessed at rather than known.²⁶

²⁰ Id., 'O'Mulconry's glossary', *ACL*, 1:2-3 (Halle, 1898-1900), 232-324, 473-81, 629. ²¹ Id., 'On the metrical glossaries of the medieval Irish', *TPhS* (1891-4), 1-103. ²² Id., 'Three Irish medical glossaries', *ACL*, 1:3 (Halle, 1900), 325-47. ²³ Id., 'The Lecan glossary', *ACL*, 1:1 (Halle, 1898), 50-100, 324; id., 'The glossary in Egerton 158', *ACL*, 3:3 (Halle, 1906), 145-214, 247-8, 290; id., 'The Stowe glossaries', *ACL*, 3:4 (Halle, 1907), 268-89. This is in addition to id., 'A Cornish glossary', *TPhS* (1868-9), 137-250; id., 'A glossary to the Cornish drama *Beunans Meriasek*', *ACL*, 1:1 (Halle, 1898), 101-42; id., 'Notes on Endlicher's Gaulish glossary', *TPhS* (1868-9), 251-4; as well as very many collections of glosses, culminating in the definitive collection of Old Irish material from early manuscripts edited with John Strachan: *Thesaurus palaeohibernicus: a collection of Old Irish glosses, scholia, prose and verse*, 2 vols & suppl. (Cambridge, 1901-10). ²⁴ Stokes, *Three Irish glossaries*, p. xxvii. The sentiment is echoed at the start of his 1893 edition of Cormac's glossary, 'On the Bodleian fragment', p. 149: 'Cormac's glossary is a mediaeval Irish Etymologicum, full of absurd attempts to trace words to their sources'. ²⁵ The glosses of Stokes' editions were not interlinear or marginal in their extant manuscripts, though may have originated as such. The distinction between glosses and glossaries is somewhat fluid, however; on the origins and development of these terms, see Louis Holtz, 'Glossaires et grammaires dans l'antiquité' in J. Hamesse (ed.), *Les manuscrits des lexiques et glossaires de l'antiquité tardive à la fin du moyen âge*, Textes et études du moyen âge, 4 (Louvain-la-neuve, 1996), pp 1-21. ²⁶ See Stokes, *Irish glosses*, pp 1-2; Zeuss, *Grammatica celtica*, i, p. ix.

The need for a dictionary of Old and Middle Irish was certainly pressing. Stokes, like Zeuss before him, initially relied heavily on Edward O'Reilly's Irish–English dictionary.²⁷ O'Reilly's work was the culmination of a tradition of Irish lexicography in print going back to Mícheál Ó Cléirigh's *Foclóir nó sanasán nuadh*, published at Louvain in 1643. All of these works included entries derived from early texts such as Cormac's glossary and *Dúil Dromma Cetta*, and O'Reilly's dictionary therefore drew on the early Irish glossary tradition both directly and indirectly. Stokes was well aware of its limitations.²⁸ His *Urkeltischer Sprachschatz* later provided the first lexicon for Irish based on Indo-European roots,²⁹ while the *ACL*,³⁰ co-edited with Kuno Meyer, eventually provided material for the Royal Irish Academy's *DIL*, which began to appear (after Stokes' lifetime) in 1913. In the meantime, scholars were largely dependent on glossaries created by editors for individual texts, and Stokes is credited with thirty-nine such glossaries in R.I. Best's *Bibliography of Irish philology and of printed Irish literature*.³¹ Nonetheless, it is striking to consider the number of medieval glossaries (which can be considered early lexicographical works) edited by Stokes for the ends of modern lexicography, including, for example, seven such glossaries in the three volumes of his *ACL*.³²

Another major focus was etymology. His first edition, *Irish glosses*, asserts the value of comparative linguistics in order to obtain 'immediate results of high historical importance' regarding the early history of the Celts,³³ and his editions of glossaries abound with etymological observations. So, just as Stokes' editions of Irish glossaries drew on an early medieval tradition of lexicography for the same purpose in his own day, his etymological investigations made use of early Irish etymological tracts. However, Stokes' estimate of their value (as noted above) was dismissive. The disparagement of medieval texts by their early editors was not something unusual in itself.³⁴ Other glossary traditions could

27 See n. 12 above. 28 See *Remarks on the Celtic additions to Curtius' Greek etymology* (1875), p. 2 (referring to contributions by Windisch): 'First of all, on behalf of sound philology, I must protest against the use of O'Reilly's dictionary for scientific purposes. The book is quite untrustworthy: it swarms with forgeries and blunders; and its only value lies in the extracts which it contains from O'Clery and other old glossarists, whose explanations O'Reilly often misunderstands ... Windisch was long enough in Ireland to learn that certain self-styled Irish scholars are like some of the Pandits here in India, able to produce any word for any meaning, and any meaning for any word.' 29 *Urkeltischer Sprachschatz, übersetzt überarbeitet und herausgegeben von Bezzenger* (Göttingen, 1894) [= August Fick (ed.), *Vergleichendes Wörterbuch der indogermanischen Sprachen*, 4. Auflage, 2. Teil]. 30 3 vols, in 11 parts (Halle, 1898–1907). 31 R.I. Best, *Bibliography of Irish philology and of printed Irish literature* (Dublin, 1913), pp 10–11. 32 See nn 19, 20, 22, 23 above. 33 Stokes, *Irish glosses*, p. 2. 34 See, for example, Robert Atkinson's notorious diatribe against medieval Irish literature in the introduction to his facsimile edition, *The Yellow Book of Lecan: a collection of pieces (prose and verse) in the Irish language, in part compiled at the end of the fourteenth century* (Dublin, 1896), p. 4: 'In all the enormous mass of Irish MSS preserved, there is absolutely nothing that in the faintest degree rivals the splendours of the vernacular literature of the Middle Ages ... Whatever be the value of these pages from the side

evoke such a similar response. The great Latinist W.M. Lindsay published frequently on Latin glossaries from 1916 until his death in 1937, in the meantime overseeing the publication of a five-volume edition of these texts.³⁵ Reviewing his own editions in 1927, he remarks of Martin of Laon, ‘He was an Irishman, every inch of him, and amused himself and mystified his pupils by some weird Greek etymologies’, and, concerning the use of Latin of glossaries for the compilation of the *Thesaurus linguae latinae*: ‘Really, I must drop my pen for a moment and have a good laugh at the absurdity of all of this’.³⁶ Such dismissal of medieval etymology, without regard for its intellectual or historical context, is still prevalent in contemporary scholarship, with the derivations proposed in Cormac’s glossary and similar works often condescendingly dismissed as ‘foolish’ or ‘fanciful’ or similar.³⁷

Nonetheless, Stokes’ reference to the ‘predecessors of Bopp’ suggests his opprobrium was at least equally directed at the etymological speculations of more recent generations. In the medieval Irish tradition, etymological tracts were more or less confined to texts of the early period only: Cormac’s glossary, *Dúil Dromma Cetta* and O’Mulconry’s glossary in particular. Although their manuscript transmission continued down to the sixteenth century, the next most significant development for Irish etymology was Edward Lhuys’s *Archaeologia Britannica* (Oxford, 1707), in which the author identified the relationship of Irish, Welsh and Breton, and coined the term ‘Celtic languages’. With the subsequent global expansion of European powers in the eighteenth century, and the exposure of the West to new cultures and languages, the opportunities for linguistic comparisons reached altogether new heights. This is embodied more than anywhere else in the work of Charles Vallancey, who published *An essay on the antiquity of the Irish language* (Dublin, 1772), giving tabulations of Irish words with Manx, Greek, Latin, Arabic, Persian and Kalmuck (the language of a Mongolian people on the north of the Caspian Sea), and afterwards collations of Irish with Chinese and Japanese in *Collectanea de rebus hibernicis* (Dublin, 1786), and in his *Prospectus of a dictionary of the language of the Aire-Coti or ancient Irish* (Dublin, 1802) with Persian, Hindi, Arabic and Chaldean.³⁸

of folk-lore in its widest sense, their value as literature is but small; it is from the point of view of linguistic study chiefly that students will continue to pore over them.’ 35 W.M. Lindsay et al. (eds), *Glossaria latina*, 5 vols (Paris, 1926–31). On the background to Lindsay’s editions, see A.C. Dionisotti, ‘On the nature and transmission of Latin glossaries’ in Hamesse (ed.), *Les manuscrits des lexiques et glossaires*, pp 205–50. 36 W.M. Lindsay, review of *Glossaria latina*, *Archivum latinitatis mediæ ævi*, 3 (1927), 95–100 at 95, repr. in Michael Lapidge (ed.), *Studies on mediaeval glossaries* (Aldershot, 1996), no. xviii. 37 A re-evaluation of ancient and medieval etymology can be found in Mark Amsler, *Etymology and grammatical discourse in Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages*, *Studies in the History of the Language Sciences*, 44 (Amsterdam, 1989). In the context of Irish literature, see Rolf Baumgarten, ‘Etymological aetiology in Irish tradition’, *Ériu*, 41 (1990), 115–22; id., ‘Creative medieval etymology and Irish hagiography (Lasair, Columba, Senán)’, *Ériu*, 54 (2004), 49–78. 38 The full title of the last includes ‘An

Vallancey's etymologies are now notorious. The Dalai-Lama is associated with Irish *dala* (that is, *dál*) 'a tribe', and thus explained as 'the chief tribe priest'. The name of the Kalmuks is derived from *Ceil-mic*, or *Keilt-mac*, 'the sons or descendants of the Kals or Kelts'. The Chinese word for chess, apparently *phil*, meaning 'the elephant', corresponds to the Irish word *fithill*.³⁹ As late as 1828, after Jacob Grimm and Rasmus Rask had articulated the principle of regular sound change,⁴⁰ James Scurry published 'a model of a comprehensive Irish dictionary', asserting Celtic as the legitimate parent of all European languages, and associating Irish words with Hebrew, Chaldaic, Turkish, Greek, Latin, Spanish, Calmuc, Hungarian, Grisons, Syracusan, Bythinian, Syriac, Welsh, Armoric, Cornish and Italian.⁴¹ Even after Bopp gave his seminal paper on Celtic to the Prussian Academy in 1838,⁴² Sir William Betham could publish etymologies providing derivations for the names of Roman gods from rather dubious Irish (equated with the Phoenician language), such as *dia* 'goddess', *na* 'the' for Diana, *ab* 'lord', *ol* 'mighty', *lu* 'of the waters' for Apollo, *er* 'illustrious, great', *ac* 'with', *las* 'light' for Hercules, and so on.⁴³

The fundamental shortcoming of traditional etymology, in the mould of Varro, was that it lacked any theoretical framework that would explain apparent linguistic correspondences in a systematic and verifiable (that is, scientific) way. But whereas such models were potentially available to Scurry and Betham,⁴⁴ the early etymological tradition in medieval Irish glossaries developed in an altogether different context. Those works were entirely in concordance with dominant frameworks of scholarly authority. Firstly, their methods were based on the etymologies of the Latin linguistic tradition, with its origins in Alexandrian Greek scholarship. Secondly, they were concordant with eminent

account of the ogam tree-alphabet of the Irish lately found in an ancient Arabic manuscript in Egypt'. On orientalism and the Irish language, see Joseph Th. Leerssen, 'On the edge of Europe: Ireland in search of oriental roots, 1650–1850', *Comparative Criticism*, 8 (1986), 91–112. 39 Vallancey, *An essay*, pp 93, 92, 85. Even the errata make for some interesting reading. On p. 16, col. 1, l. 16 of the dictionary, the word 'leaning' is an error for 'learning' (the two are distinct after all). 40 For a survey of the early development of Indo-European studies with particular reference to Celtic, see Toon van Hal, 'From Jones to Pictet: some notes on the early history of Celtic linguistics', *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Sprachwissenschaft*, 15 (2005), 219–43. On Rask specifically, see Alderik H. Blom, 'Rasmus Rask's study of Celtic', *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Sprachwissenschaft*, 19 (2009), 203–22. 41 James Scurry, 'Remarks on the Irish language, with a review of its grammars, glossaries, vocabularies and dictionaries; to which is added a model of a comprehensive Irish dictionary', *Transactions of the Royal Irish Academy*, 15 (1828), 3–88. 42 Franz Bopp, 'Über die celtischen Sprachen vom Gesichtspunkte der vergleichenden Sprachforschung', *Abhandlungen der königlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin aus dem Jahre 1838. Philosophisch-historische Klasse* (1839), 187–272. 43 William Betham, *Etruria celtica: Etruscan literature and antiquities investigated, or, the language of that people compared and identified with the Ibero-Celtic, and both shown to be Phoenician* (Dublin, 1842). 44 We should perhaps not judge Scurry too harshly: a man of talent but of very limited means who died young; see the biographical note by Kathleen Laffan, 'James Scurry (1790–1828): a south Kilkenny scholar', *Decies: Journal of the Old Waterford Society*, 50 (autumn 1994), 60–6.

authorities, most notably the encyclopaedic *Etymologiae* of Isidore of Seville,⁴⁵ but also the word-analysis applied by Jerome to the Hebrew language in his *Book on the interpretation of Hebrew names* and other exegetical texts.⁴⁶ And thirdly, the early Irish account of the relationships of Irish with Latin, Greek, Hebrew and other languages was in harmony with the biblical account of the historical separation of languages at the Tower of Babel.

There are perhaps some indications that Stokes had more appreciation for his medieval predecessors than he cared to admit. In *Three Irish glossaries*, he lists about 230 Irish words borrowed from Latin, nearly all of which are identified as such in the glossaries.⁴⁷ And directly after his ‘harmless calling’ remark, he credits Cormac with ‘having found out one or two facts in Celtic etymology’,⁴⁸ for example the loss of initial *p*, the equivalence of Welsh *p* and Irish *c* (from */k^w/) in certain words, and the correspondence of Latin *u* and Irish *f* in others.⁴⁹ The last observation is even given an abstract formulation approaching in its own way the modern expression of a sound law: ‘commonly the *u* consonant (the *v*) with the Latinist is the fern (letter *f*) in the Gaelic’.⁵⁰

Stokes expresses his sharp disdain for contemporary scholarship in Ireland in the opening words of his edition of metrical glossaries: ‘With the exception of the modern Irish Celts, all races possessed of an ancient literature desire to understand it’.⁵¹ Stokes’ real target here, of course, was not Cormac mac Cuilennáin (to whom Cormac’s glossary is traditionally attributed), but those scholars of his own day who clung to long-outmoded views of the Irish language, and who would or could not keep pace with the new philology emerging from Germany.

Stokes’ engagement with traditional Irish linguistic scholarship is perhaps nowhere more evident than in his publication of John O’Donovan’s translation of Cormac’s glossary, seven years after O’Donovan’s death.⁵² The preface,

45 W.M. Lindsay (ed.), *Isidori Hispalensis episcopi etymologiarum sive originum libri XX*, 2 vols (Oxford, 1911). 46 Paul de Lagarde (ed.), *Onomastica sacra* (Göttingen, 1870, 2nd ed. 1887; repr. Hildesheim, 1966), pp 1–81. 47 Stokes, *Three Irish glossaries*, pp xix–xxvii. 48 *Ibid.*, pp xxvii–xxviii. 49 Indeed, for all the leaps of imagination that some glossary entries do indeed display, recent work by Paul Russell has shown that the parameters by which words are etymologically associated are in fact quite limited, and generally mirror the system of syntactic phonological changes found in Irish; see Paul Russell, ‘*Quasi*: bridging the etymological gap in early Irish glossaries’ in Bernadette Smelik, Rijklof Hofman, Camiel Hamans & David Cram (eds), *A companion in linguistics: a Festschrift for Anders Ahlqvist on the occasion of his sixtieth birthday* (Nijmegen, 2005), pp 49–62. 50 Stokes, *Three Irish glossaries*, p. 28. For analysis of this entry, see Paul Russell, ‘*Fern do frestol na .u. consaine*: perceptions of sound laws, sound change and linguistic borrowing among the medieval Irish’ (forthcoming). 51 ‘On the metrical glossaries of the medieval Irish’, p. 1. 52 See n. 18 above. O’Donovan had earlier published excerpts, with translations, as ‘Ancient Irish literature: Cormac’s glossary’, *Dublin Penny Journal*, 2:55–7 (20 July–3 Aug. 1833), 19–20, 26–27, 37–8. Stokes had also acknowledged his use of O’Donovan’s ‘version’ (i.e. translation?) of Cormac’s glossary in *Three Irish glossaries*, p. lxxv.

signed 'Calcutta, Christmas, 1868', acknowledges 'the wide and accurate knowledge of the ancient Irish language which he possessed when I enjoyed the privilege of knowing and learning from him',⁵³ echoing similar sentiments in earlier works. O'Donovan may be regarded as an embodiment of traditional Irish learning. He was a fluent speaker of the modern language,⁵⁴ worked initially as a copyist of Irish manuscripts, and came to acquire an unrivalled knowledge of Irish history and literature through manuscript study and intensive fieldwork as a topographer with the Ordnance Survey. For each glossary entry in his edition, Stokes first prints O'Donovan's translation, generally followed by O'Donovan's notes and finally Stokes' own remarks, often correcting and supplementing both O'Donovan and the ideas expressed in the glossary itself. This arrangement highlights not only Stokes' deference to O'Donovan, but also the differences in their respective scholarly outlooks. For example, where O'Donovan makes reference to modern Irish dialects and writings, Stokes instead cites practically every other Indo-European language. For the entry *cai* meaning 'a way', O'Donovan comments that *caoi* is a word 'still living in Connacht', where Stokes instead gives the Indo-European root, and comparanda from Greek, Latin, Cornish and Breton. While O'Donovan observes that *etarche* 'is now written *eitre*, and used in Kilkenny, Waterford etc. to signify a furrow', Stokes cites Manx and Sanskrit words, and speculates on the Old Celtic form. O'Donovan states that *ib* is 'now obsolete, though used by writers of the last century', and Stokes cites Greek, Old Slavonic and Latin cognates. O'Donovan's notes, unsurprisingly, are replete with details of local topography, where Stokes' show as much interest in India as in Ireland; the former records that 'the ruin of the fort of Emhain, now called the Navan fort, is about two miles W. of Armagh', where Stokes comments that 'the superstition here referred to, ... immolating a human being to insure the stability of a building is still current in India'. And elsewhere, referring to ritualistic movements: 'In the Hills here at Simla the men walk sunwise round their *gurus* either thrice or seven times'.⁵⁵ Stokes' edition of O'Donovan's translation of Cormac's glossary is therefore very much a tripartite work: an Indo-European linguist stationed in India elaborating the work of an Irish scholar traditionally trained, both of them elucidating a text representative of the medieval Irish linguistic tradition.⁵⁶

Stokes was certainly dismissive of the Irish linguistic tradition. However, his criticisms would have rung hollow were he not able to correct the work of previous generations with better informed hypotheses drawing on the new paradigm of Indo-European linguistics. He was certainly engaged with early

53 O'Donovan & Stokes, *Cormac's glossary*, p. iii. 54 John O'Donovan, *Grammar of the Irish language* (Dublin, 1845), was used by Zeuss (see *Grammatica celtica*, p. ix). 55 O'Donovan & Stokes, *Cormac's glossary*, pp 46, 65, 93, 63, 138. 56 For Stokes' uneasy relationship with the modern language, see the discussion below by Nollaig Ó Muraíle.

linguistic texts throughout his long and prolific career, and he repeatedly acknowledged his debt to scholars such as Todd, O'Curry and especially O'Donovan. Although in his later introductions particularly he preferred to set himself radically apart from his predecessors, he was, in some ways at least, the inheritor of both medieval and modern traditional Irish learning.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ It is a testament to the longevity of Stokes' work that Cormac's glossary, *Dúil Dromma Cetta* and O'Mulconry's glossary are only now being re-edited as part of the Early Irish Glossaries Project based at the University of Cambridge (see www.asnc.cam.ac.uk/irishglossaries). This chapter draws on research funded by the Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences and the (UK) Arts and Humanities Research Council.