Visions of the Irish Dream

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE

"An Irishman's heart is nothing but his imagination."
—G. B. Shaw, *John Bull's Other Island*

Attempts to define the Irish dream always seem to lead to some effort at articulation of the American dream, and both dreams are constructed by both emigrants' and immigrants' imaginations. Indefinable, the imagined states are stubbornly intertwined; they conjure up nostalgic reminiscences and invoke real or projected memories of yesteryear. For those who would hunt down the Celtic Tiger, the perception of some golden age represented for the return emigrant (from North America), as well as the new faces from less privileged populations, something like what America once represented for the Irishman leaving his homeland in the nineteenth century. But twenty-first-century Ireland continues to change its demeanor in light of economic upheaval and racism. Declan Kiberd points out in his essay, "Multiculturalism in Ireland," that echoes of xenophobia that Joyce projected through Mr. Deasy's comment on the Jews (that Ireland had never persecuted them because she had never let them in) may find may be found in the reluctance of some Irish citizens to accept Nigerians or Romanians.[1] A collection of essays, then, that assumes the charge of defining the "Irish dream," is forced to address a bottomless list of questions, most of which center around the definer of the dream and his potential achievement of the goal. Further, it mandates that we examine historical and cultural perceptions of the land of the dream, artists' depictions of it in poetry, prose, and drama, and historical and sociological accounts of glimpses into the dream from both sides of the Atlantic.

This study examines the formation of an Irish national identity and the subsequent pursuit of self-determination that are effected through the creative medium, homeland governance, and/or immigration. It takes a hard look at contemporary disillusionment over an Ireland whose rhetorical paradigm has shifted, a modern European Union nation that struggles to address the somber tone of gender issues, the plight of non-nationals, urban blight, and advancing technology, while striving to retain the lilt that enchants the tourist. In pursuit of the Irish dream, artists and

[1] In *The Irish Writer and His World* (New York: Cambridge University Press: 2001), 304.

writers try to capture a model that is admittedly a twenty-first –century chimera, alternately displaying pride and disdain at the advancements that have contributed to the globalization of a nation that has not yet achieved a century of emancipation from British rule.

In Ken Bruen's 2006 novel *Priest*, the narrator, an ex-*gardai* officer who has lost his self-respect, his job, and his mental stability because, as an alcoholic, his negligence led to the accidental death of a friend's Down Syndrome child, struggles to comprehend Ireland. The fifty-something narrator, Jack Taylor, tries to sort out issues of trust with respect to a wannabe co-investigator in a child abuse case involving a Galway clergyman. His journalist friend Joe Ryan explains: "This is the new Ireland, no one believes in the Government or the Clergy, and as for the banks, forget it, they're robbing us blind and admitting it."[2] While the above model sounds hauntingly familiar in its projection of modern distrust of venerable institutions, the novel itself carefully balances the voice of progress with the voice of tradition. Despite its tragic ending, a gripping scene in which the narrator loses a surrogate son, the uplifting message, that the Irish "dream" centers around need for and commitment to family, is spelled out clearly. Irish nationalism, therefore, finds definition outside of political and religious affiliations; Irish American nationalism, a transliteration of what constitutes "Irishness," struggles to maintain the tradition; and American Irish repatriation makes an effort to retrieve what semblance of Irish identity in which it still believes.

The essays in this study attempt to capture the pieces of the Irish dream that have not faded. "Shaping an Irish Dream: Ferguson, Mangan, and the Politics of Translation" examines the intrusion of the past in modern attempts to represent a balanced view of Irish Protestantism and Irish Catholicism in the making of an Irish nation, while "The Roman Catholic Church, the National Schools, and the Christian Brothers" takes a look at how the introduction of incrementally advanced education of Catholics advanced the nationalist cause. Counterpointing the nationalist discourse, the essay, "The Shortest Way to Tara is Via Holyhead: Stephen Dedalus' (Celtic) Vision, Ireland's Nightmare, and Joyce's Re(Vision) of the Irish Dream" investigates James Joyce's self-imposed exile as a means to sort out Irish identity, while "Shattering Irish Dreams in Nicola McCartney's *Heritage*" discusses the conflicted visions of two Irish families from the North that have emigrated to Canada during the World War I era.

In "Becoming American: The Irish in America's Consumer Culture, 1880-1905," the dream of the Irish emigrant argues against the nostalgic

[2] *Priest* (New York: St. Martin's Minotaur: 2006), 131.

love of the old country, while the alleged myth of the abiding commitment to hearth and home in the Irish psyche is reinforced in "Paula and the Commitmentettes: Reflections on Social Changes and Gender in Irish Literature" And finally, the voice of the poet, in "Redefining Passion in Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin's Magdalene" reasserts the Irishman's belief in the power of the dream, as it is connected with voices that emerge from skeletal remains, while Jennifer Johnston's characters in a series of her novels (discussed in "Of Dreams and Peace: Jennifer Johnston's Traumatic Vision") re-immerse and renew themselves in the sea that Joyce's Dedalus once remarked on as the sea that washed all Ireland, returning us to the role of memory and consciousness in the definition or the Irish dream.

If a piece of the Irish dream is what the postmodern American materially seeks to acquire, it is a commodity based on leprechauns, shamrocks, and Guinness, and contemporary Irish writers are acutely aware of distinctions between the projected and the real. If it was once, for the westward bound Irish, ironically, the luxury of settling into a comfortable middle-class life-style that would be mirrored in the new Ireland of cable television, shopping malls, and acquired American accents, historians and sociologists are trying to nail down the aspects of the dream that are peculiarly Irish. The notion that the dream still exists lends credence to the artists' relentless attempts to depict real or imagined memory, while it compels the historian to assert the difference between the two. The interplay of the essays in this collection reflects varying perspectives of the Irish dream and, in doing so, they keep it alive.

CHAPTER ONE

JAMES HARDIMAN, SAMUEL FERGUSON, JAMES CLARENCE MANGAN AND THE POLITICS OF TRANSLATION

JEFFREY BAGGETT

In nineteenth-century Ireland, the publication of translated Gaelic verse necessarily occurred within a changing political context, one in which emerged many endeavors toward the shaping of an Irish cultural nationalism. After Emancipation in 1829, the positions for political debate were being reconfigured and the sectarian differences between Protestant and Catholic, Orange and Green, were transformed into oppositions, Ireland versus England, nationalist versus unionist. In the 1820s, antiquarian research seems to emerge as a pursuit uniting native and settler into a common Irish national awareness. In the period 1825-1841, it looked as if a non-partisan interest in native culture and antiquities would develop again and provide a sanctuary from politics, where people of different religious and political persuasions could meet.

Many of those involved in this interest in cultural nationalism considered it an apolitical endeavor that provided an opportunity for developing common ground. This neutrality, however, was often difficult to sustain, and the latter-day observer can register clear sectarian differences; seemingly straightforward fragments of Ireland's past were actually organized along specific ideological frameworks. Irish writers and translators whose project it was to represent this past were working within the political climate following Emancipation, so they could not help but configure Ireland's turbulent history in light of their own ideology and present convictions. The defining of Irish identity, the significance of an historical event, the translated meaning of a Gaelic text—each was ultimately determined by a writer's own political affiliation and conviction.

Three writers will demonstrate the versatility of such literary endeavors that sought to characterize Irish identity using material from Ireland's past: James Hardiman, Samuel Ferguson, and James Clarence Mangan. James Hardiman, an antiquarian and Irish Catholic, and Samuel Ferguson, an Anglo-Irish critic and translator, were both greatly interested in establishing an Irish identity, each using ancient literary sources for his own particular project. More specifically, these two figures who wrote in the 1830s help us to demarcate some of the differences existing between Catholic and Protestant in the values and methods used to define Irish identity in the mid-nineteenth century before the Irish Revival was fully underway. The third writer, James Clarence Mangan, also Catholic Irish, published his translations, poetry, and essays in both unionist and nationalist periodicals, and often his politics are less conspicuous in his work. Both Ferguson and Mangan also worked in the Ordnance Survey and there is some overlap in their shared ideas about cultural nationalism. However, contrasting Mangan's translated Irish material to that of Ferguson clarifies important convictions that separate them and their ideas about Irish identity. If we examine each of these writers in turn, three important kinds of nationalism--three dreams of Ireland will emerge, all derived from much of the same material.

James Hardiman, historian and Gaelic scholar, used literary relics to persuade fellow Catholics that a rich, noble civilization existed in the past, a culture that had become nearly forgotten because of British domination. Hardiman's political purpose is overt: he uses the ancient poems and his politically-charged annotations both as a defense against prevailing ideas about Irish culture being backward and as evidence that this developed culture was undermined by centuries of oppression and dispossession. His anthology of Gaelic verse, *Irish Minstrelsy , Or Bardic Remains of Ireland* (1831), included poetry from many periods and initiated a strong sectarian reaction from Samuel Ferguson who responded to the collection with a four-part review and by rendering some translations of his own.[1]

In the last two decades, the prevailing view of Samuel Ferguson by literary scholars (David Lloyd, David Cairns and Shaun Richards, Joep Leerssen, and Terry Eagleton) was that he was essentially an agent of the unionist and imperialist Protestant Ascendancy and his antiquarian interest in Irish native culture was to assimilate it to serve the interests of the larger empire.[2] Recently, this view has been challenged by Eve Patten's nuanced

[1] James Hardiman, *Irish Minstrelsy, Bardic Remains of Ireland with English Poetical Translation*, 2 Vols. (London: Joseph Robins, 1831).

[2] See David Lloyd, "Arnold, Ferguson, Schiller: Aesthetic Culture and the Politics of Aesthetics," *Cultural Critique*. (Winter 1985-86), 2:137-169, David Cairns and

reading of Ferguson as a man whose background and values do not fit easily into this Ascendancy mindset or into the class it most often is thought to represent.[3] Although the convictions of the private man may differ to some extent from his public writings, it is clear that in the context of his review of Hardiman, Ferguson was writing for the *Dublin University Magazine*, a publication primarily concerned with safeguarding the Protestant Ascendancy in the aftermath of Catholic emancipation. Within this context he wished to convince his Anglo-Irish contemporaries—of whatever class-- that their survival required that they come to terms with Gaelic culture to be shared alike with their Catholic Irish compatriots. And if it was not the Anglo-Irish elite who must take the lead in recovering and identifying with the Irish past, it was a rising, urban, professional middle class, which included those like Ferguson himself, who were at the heart of Dublin's intellectual life and its growing conviction for a shared civic sensibility. His project was to transform Anglo-Irish culture into a national Irish culture. His four-part review of James Hardiman's *Irish Minstrelsy* stimulated many of Ferguson's first translations and literary assessments. Hardiman thus serves as an early and important catalyst for Ferguson's first translations and interpretations of Gaelic verse and in his review we can observe the contending contexts that inform his translation of this verse into a language and into the political agenda he advocates.

Up to the time it was published in 1831, *Irish Minstrelsy, or Bardic Remains of Ireland* was the most comprehensive collection of Gaelic lyrics, appearing only two years after the granting of Catholic Emancipation. Included in this two-volume anthology were the Irish texts of 125 songs, poems, and fragments of sixteenth- to eighteenth-century Gaelic lyrics versified into English on facing pages of the Irish text. Hardiman was a native Irish speaker, a pious Catholic, and sympathetic to O'Connell's campaign for the repeal of the Act of Union. This background is clearly reflected in his editorial notes, which accompany many of the lyrics, and which are often critical of the Ascendancy and of Anglicism. His lengthy introduction to the collection sets up the historical (and

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Shaun Richards, *Writing Ireland: Colonialism, Nationalism, and Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), Joep Leerssen, *Remembrance and Imagination: Patterns in Historical and Literary Representation of Ireland in the Nineteenth Century* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), and Terry Eagleton, *Scholars and Rebels in Nineteenth-Century Ireland* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, Inc., 1999).

[3] Eve Patten, *Samuel Ferguson and the Culture of Nineteenth-century Ireland (*Four Courts Press: Dublin, 2004*).*

political) framework for reading his anthology. An example of the religious enmity of the period is apparent in a passage on the Penal Laws where Hardiman affirms: "It was resolved to reduce the poor Catholics to a state of mental darkness, in order to convert them into enlightened Protestants."[4] (xxxii). In concert with the times, Hardiman's prefatory essay is less concerned with illustrating the aesthetic values of Irish poetry than with foregrounding larger political and historical concerns; his foremost interest is in championing Irish culture on the basis of its antiquarian literature, and in contrast to all that is considered English. His introductory essay contains a series of assertive, dogmatic pronouncements asserting the superiority of Gaelic culture. He bases his judgment largely on what he sees as Gaelic culture's affinities with Greece and Rome plural?. Although there is always an implicit comparison between Ireland and England in his argument, his overt comparative approach employs primarily classical civilizations, thereby attempting to bypass the usual English/Irish polarity that was commonly employed by his opponents in assessing Irish culture.

Hardiman's essay is an extensive catalogue of Irish cultural achievements, especially in poetry and music. He provides a version of Irish history to counter the predominating English view of Ireland's arrested development. He declares, for example, that "If patriotism, genius, and learning, are entitled to regard amongst mankind, no men were ever more deserving of national honor than the ancient bards of Ireland"[5] . Of Irish civilization, he declares the structure and stability of its laws, its courts, its royal patronage of music and poetry, and asserts the superiority of the Irish language. Hardiman proclaims Ireland a noble, tranquil and gentle civilization in which "peace and concord reigned."[6] In so doing, Hardiman discusses Irish literature as a cultural manifestation rather than to emphasize it as a product of essential, ethnic genius, stressing instead the development of the civilization as a whole. Further, he is less concerned with describing the particular content of his collection, individual poems, for example, than with proclaiming generally the international stature of Irish literature. This extensive preface demonstrates Hardiman's urgency to embrace a national literary identity, one that not only looks beyond English influences for its affinities with classical cultures but that also deserves international recognition.

For Hardiman, the ancient poet was a product of Irish culture rather than an inspired, natural genius. He was a cultivated bard who symbolized

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[4] .Hardiman, *Irish Minstrelsy*, xxxii.
[5] Ibid., xxi.
[6] Ibid, v.

a classical dignity that once existed in Irish culture. Describing poetry in Irish prior to the pre Anglo-Norman period, Hardiman declares:

> They do not possess any of the wild, barbarous fervour of the Scandinavian Scalds; nor yet the effeminate softness of the professors of the 'gay science', when the Troubadours and lady-bards of the period to which we are now arrived. The simplicity of expression, and dignity of thought, which characterize Greek and Roman writers of the purest period, pervade the productions of our bards.[7]

Hardiman refers to the ancient bard, Flann, as the "Virgil of Ireland," and to the bard, Donogh O'Daly, as "The Ovid of Ireland."[8] This emphasis on classicism is in part his reaction against the sentimental (and Romantic) Celticist portrait of literature in Irish as produced from a wild people possessed of natural Ossianic eloquence. As with the "purest" periods of Greece and Rome which produced these poets, a golden age of Gaelic civilization produced its own classical poets. As Ireland had attained such a golden age, the Island, he implies, did not (and more importantly *does* not) require the civilizing influence of the English.

James Hardiman clarifies his anti-unionist, anti-imperialist agenda when he characterizes the national bard against both the English values of refinement and the condescending attitude pervading much antiquarian research:

> But the bards were "mere Irish." They thought and spoke and wrote in Irish. They were, invariably, Catholics, patriots, and Jacobites. Even their broad Celtic surnames they disdained to submit to the polish of Saxon refinement. Hence, they have been erroneously considered, and by many of the educated of their country are still considered, as *rude rural rhymesters*, without any claim either to talents or learning.[9] (my emphasis)

Emphasizing not only the Celtic racial identity of the bards against that of the Saxon, Hardiman also foregrounds the bards' Catholic cultural and political identity as integral to their literary achievement. This Catholic identification starkly contrasts the assumptions of Ferguson- and those prevailing with later Anglo-Irish writers--particularly Standish O'Grady and W. B. Yeats—that unwavering devotion to Catholicism was a major

[7] Ibid., xvi.
[8] Ibid., xiv, xvii.
[9] Ibid., xxv.

determinant of the arrested development and decline of Irish culture[10]. Ferguson seeks to claim the Irish natural piety that militated against cultural development. Hardiman discusses the Catholic culture as an innate part of the classical culture.[11]

Hardiman's forty-page preface might well have been entitled "In Defense of Irish Classical Identity," for his discussion of the poetry itself (and the translations of Gaelic verse) is secondary, deferred as it is for several pages and only presented after his defense of Ireland's history, music, government, education and language. His anthology is among several of his personal efforts to restore to the Irish public an image of a heritage through ancient Irish literature. He wishes to revive a noble identity of the past and, by implication, to prescribe an Irish culture for the future. Hardiman wants his readers to know that a golden age of Irish civilization not only thrived but was gradually undermined by conquering nations; British influence had impeded cultural development rather than refined it. Hardiman cites from ancient Irish annals to provide his version of history. According to him, after the fall of Limerick to Williamite forces in 1691, the ancient Gaelic system of patronage and the training that made it possible were irrevocably doomed. According to Hardiman's introductory argument to his anthology, Irish culture has been on the decline since the presence of English on the island.

Hardiman's version of Irish history, that of England's responsibility for Ireland's cultural discontinuity, is still asserted today by historians and scholars of Gaelic literature. Daniel Corkery asserted a similar view in the 1920s, and more recently Philip O'Leary in his *The Prose Literature of the Gaelic Revival* (1994) perhaps most forcefully defends this position when he writes:

> The causes of this literary destitution lie in turbulent disjunctions of Irish colonial history. A coherent cultural evolution had little chance against the incessant and savage religious and ethnic warfare of the seventeenth century, the penal legislation of the eighteenth century that attempted to degrade the Gaelic-speaking Roman Catholic Irish to illiterate penury, or the Famine and subsequent almost instinctive emigration of the nineteenth

[10] I am thinking here of O'Grady's introduction to Volume I of his *History of Ireland* (1878), and of Yeats's *The Wanderings of Oisin* (1889), in which Oisin returns to Ireland only to discover the effects of St. Patrick's Catholicism.

[11] Ferguson, O'Grady and Yeats were particularly devoted to the ancient legends because they preceded Irish Catholic culture.

> century that accelerated an already marked linguistic shift toward English.[12]

Similarly, the poet Daibhidh O Bruadair (c. 1625-98) who wrote as a witness to and victim of that violence and oppression, lamented:

> After the death of the poets, whose riches were poems and wit;
> Woe unto him who hath seen the fate that hath come upon us;
> Their books, now unheeded in corners, lie
> Mouldering, covered with dust,
> While of their mystical treasures no whit is possessed by their sons.[13]

This version of Irish history and the rupture of Gaelic civilization by colonial oppression remain crucial when examining the polemical debates of the nineteenth century. However didactic and reactionary his introduction, Hardiman's ideas deserve more credence than Ferguson's own polemic allows (as we shall see), and Hardiman's essay clarifies how much relevant Irish history is conspicuously absent in Ferguson's own account, and points to the divide between them. Hardiman's repeated assertions for the superiority of the productions of Irish culture are simply a reversal of that dominant model of power in imperialist discourse,which assumes the superiority of the imperial nation over that of the native. This approach may also have influenced Hardiman's expectations for how the poems themselves should be translated by his team of Gaelic scholars. As is usually remarked of the Hardiman translations, they are rendered with the conventions of late Augustan descriptive verse and, as such, Ferguson contends, fail to demonstrate how the poems can be distinguished from other verses in English.[14] Hardiman's translations may suggest his wish to impose a similarly 'classical' aura upon the poems, thereby defending against those imperialist judgments of Irish bards as "rude rural rhymesters."

As a concerted effort to collect Irish popular poetry, his primary purpose was to publish the Irish texts "to preserve and illustrate a portion of ancient Irish literature" for his and future generations. His translations,

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[12] Philip O'Leary, *The Prose Literature of the Gaelic Revival, 1881-1921: Ideology and Innovation* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Penn State Press, 1994), 2.
[13] Qtd. in O'Leary, 3.
[14] See Malcolm Brown, *Sir Samuel Ferguson* (Lewisburg,PA: Bucknell University Press, 1973), 43-60,
Peter Denman, *Samuel Ferguson: The Literary Achievement* (Savage, MD: Barnes and Noble Books, 1990), 9-33, and Robert O'Driscoll, *An Ascendancy of the Heart* (Toronto: Macmillan Company, 1976), 43-74.

therefore, were of secondary importance and meant to accompany the originals rather than to replace them. However impractical and unrealistic, his book was intended primarily for readers of Gaelic, although the readership was limited by the necessity of a knowledge of the language and by the expense of the two-volume work. Hardiman reveals his political sentiments through his introductory essay and through extended notes that he appends to the texts. His Anglo-Irish reviewer, Ferguson, methodically addresses the place of Irish identity and culture in the emerging cultural nationalism. Ferguson attempts to depose Hardiman as an authority of Gaelic literature and culture, just as Ferguson himself makes a claim to speak for the living genius of the native Irish.

James Hardiman imagined Irish literature eventually emerging from obscurity, but, as one discovers in Ferguson's work at this time, the appeal of the poetry, the view of the past, and the dream of the future, was not necessarily the same for Protestants. For Catholics like Hardiman, Gaelic verse confirmed a sense of loss after the collapse of the Gaelic order in the face of English aggression. For many Protestants, the literature of Irish antiquity was a reminder of injustice done to fellow Irishmen by their ancestors, of territorial dispossession and cultural repression. In responding to these contrasting perspectives, Ferguson tried to discover some common territory in the literature of Irish antiquity, a still point through which contemporary differences could be resolved. He found an interest in Hardiman's Gaelic lyrics,, particularly for their remoteness from what he saw as the vulgar broils of his own time. As in the case of Hardiman, Ferguson's sectarian and political outlook informed his presentation of the Gaelic tradition. Although Ferguson's sympathies lie somewhere between the two extreme cultural factions, there are at least three general areas in which Ferguson differs from Hardiman: his characterization of the Irish Bard, his method for interpretation/criticism, and his version of Irish history—more particularly, his perspective on Irish cultural discontinuity and the decline of Irish civilization—all of which are directly related to differing ideas of "Irishness" or Irish identity.

Ferguson, born in Belfast in 1810, was to be influenced by the ideals of the United Irish Society. As a pupil of the Belfast Academical Institution, he learned ecumenical ideals which advocated the union of Irishmen without regard to religion or class through social interchange and education. Ferguson absorbed these ideals, taking them into his antiquarian research. His participation in the Ordnance Survey, for example, in which he worked closely and developed life long friendships with those of different political and religious beliefs, indicates that these

ideals continued into his adult and professional life. His studies of ancient texts were a means to divert attention away from the divided present. By discovering a neutral ground in the past, he hoped to dissipate the prejudices of his countrymen. His individual contributions to Irish literature—his translations from Irish poetry and his versions of early Irish narrativesare well known.

Another important influence was his association with Scotland, and the legacy of the Scottish Enlightenment, which made him more focused on the civic humanism and ideals with Edinburgh than to the imperial center, London.[15] In Edinburgh Ferguson saw a civic ideal and a shared cultural nationalism, a healthy network of intellectual and cultural societies and communities that he wished to emulate in Dublin. His acquaintances in Edinburgh included many, like William Blackwood, who were active in its flourishing publication and literary scene. Edinburgh provided one model of the kind of active cultural scene Ferguson wished to see realized in Dublin.

In 1834, after he had embarked upon a study of the Irish language and had begun reading ancient Irish poetry and publishing some of his observations in the *Dublin University Magazine*, Ferguson felt he had discovered a new lens through which to view the Irish Catholics. In his investigation of the literary legacy of his Catholic countrymen, he characterized them in a new light based upon the distinctive qualities of poetry in the Irish language. Instead of assuming ignorance, inflexibility and stubbornness as essential characteristics as he did in his earliest writing of political doggerel,[16] Ferguson began to discern qualities that constituted, for him, the heart of the Catholic nation. Ferguson warrants attention for his sincere efforts to educate his Anglo-Irish audience on the history and value associated with Irish literature, and for his attempts to forge some common ground between the two sects. In contrast to the folk material being published at the time, Ferguson's studies revealed a wealth of poetic material long-forgotten, much of it far older than the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century lyrics which were the focus of Hardiman's work. Ferguson was also interested in the bardic poetry, which embodied the legends and sagas of Ireland's pre-Christian, heroic age. In no small measure it was his review of Hardiman's *Irish Minstrelsy* and the investigations it inspired that gave Ferguson his list of these "newly discovered" essential values.

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[15] Patten, *Samuel Ferguson*, 29-51.

[16] For an example of Ferguson's early "poetry" see "An Irish Garland," *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 33(January 1833), 87-8.

Ferguson's wish to "make the people of Ireland better acquainted with one another" seems a direct result of his formative education at the Belfast Academical Institution, and the sincerity of this ecumenical spirit emerges in many of his writings.[17] Along with this good will was a culturally-embedded conflict of motives which might be supposed to affect enlightened Protestants in the wake of Catholic Emancipation and the Reform Act. Perhaps by discovering a means to alleviate this psychic insecurity, Ferguson turned to research of Irish antiquity.

This spirit of toleration and understanding for his Catholic compatriots is not always evident in some of the early writings of his career. In his 1833 essay, "A Dialogue between the Head and Heart of an Irish Protestant," Ferguson expresses the isolation and classic anxiety he shared with many other Anglo-Irish:

> Deserted by the Tories, insulted by the Whigs, threatened by the Radicals, hated by the Papists, and envied by the Dissenters….and, after all, told that we are neither English nor Irish, fish nor flesh, but a peddling colony, a forlorn advanced guard that must conform to every mutinous movement of the pretorian rabble [sic]."[18]

The "Head" of the Dialogue anticipates the worst for Ireland, following Catholic Emancipation:

> if Catholic emancipation produce repeal, so surely will repeal produce ultimate separation; and so sure as we have a separation, so surely will there be a war levied, estates confiscated, and the Popish church established.[19]

Ferguson's poem of 1833, "An Irish Garland" strongly expresses Orange bigotry and a pessimistic outlook of the imminent results of O'Connellism and Catholic Emancipation.[20] In this poem, he represents traitorous Catholics as "Jackasses of Ireland," likening O'Connell and his campaign to a rapacious Robespierre and the French Revolution. In the same issue with "An Irish Garland" appeared an article "The Present Crisis," written by Isaac Butt, the then editor of *The Dublin University Magazine*. The essay describes the destruction that would result from O'Connell, Catholic Emancipation, and the English Parliamentary Reform Act of 1832. Butt

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[17] Samuel Ferguson, "A Dialogue Between the Head and Heart of an Irish Protestant," *Dublin University Magazine*, 2, no. 11 (November 1833), 591.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Samuel Ferguson, "An Irish Garland," *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 13, no. 203 (January 1833), 87-8.

was outraged by the refusal of Irish Catholic peasants to pay Anglican tithes. These and other publications of *The Dublin University Magazine* demonstrate the level of anxiety and panic of many Protestant writers during the 1830s. In the same *Dialogue*, Ferguson explicitly declares that "We must fight our battle now with a handful of types and a composing-stick, pages like this our field, and the reading public our arbiter of war."[21] To fortify his class position and to combat with his pen the charge that the Anglo-Irish were strangers and not authentically "Irish," Ferguson saw literary antiquity as a place where he might claim identification with the Irish past. If the ideology represented in Hardiman's Catholic-centered literary excavations prevailed, Ferguson's class would lose its place in the construction of Irish identity. Thus, Irish literature and culture must be translated and inserted into a context that would allow the two cultures to equally embrace a shared national culture in Ireland's future.

Ferguson's seemingly conflicting perspectives toward Irish Catholics has been the topic of critical discussion and conjecture. Some see a change of heart that occurs as he increases his convictions in the 1830s toward cultural nationalism. Others, like Seamus Deane, see Ferguson as a figure that embodies much of the contradictory feeling experienced by many Protestants during this time.[22] Perhaps the most convincing approach to Ferguson's contradictory statements comes from Eve Patten's argument that Ferguson's relationship with the *Dublin University Magazine* necessitated that he abide by certain conventions and protocol of nineteenth-century journalism, conventions that pressured him to present a public consensus, however contrary to some of his private sensibilities.[23] He was obliged to participate somewhat in conventional efforts during his younger years. Further, this relationship with the magazine was especially strained under the editorship of Isaac Butt, whose particular kind of anti-Catholic opinions were repugnant to him. Eve Patten has produced good evidence that Ferguson had a difficult relationship with the magazine, and particularly its editor in 1834.[24] When the editorship changes, and as Ferguson's writings continue, his ecumenical spirit increasingly emerges and his tone toward the Catholics significantly softens.

However, the political content of his review and its relationship to his aesthetic theories about Gaelic verse are much less simple to evaluate. In

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[21] Ferguson, "A Dialogue," 592.
[22] Seamus Deane, *A Short History of Irish Literature* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986), 67-8.
[23] Patten, *Samuel Ferguson*, 18-19.
[24] Ibid., 61.

contrast to Hardiman's notes, which sought to sow dissension, Ferguson's approach ostensibly sought reconciliation and unity. He appears to reach his conclusions through an inductive method and through historically specific contexts that provide cogent assessments and reasoned analysis of each specific lyric. To his credit, especially in the later installments of the series, he challenges to a certain extent the racial and religious prejudice of his Protestant readers, wishing to open their minds to the different nature of Irish poetry, its subjects and cultural values. However, despite the value of his contributions and his efforts to build some common ground between the two Irish cultures, his approach to the Gaelic texts is undermined by paternalism, however affectionate, toward his Catholic counterparts.

Examining selectively Gaelic lyrics from the anthology, Ferguson counters Hardiman's assessments of Irish antiquity. Against Hardiman's characterization of ancient Irish civilization as classical, epitomized by a bard with extensive learning and technical mastery, Ferguson presents a sentimental portrait of a rustic bard, a wandering minstrel in the midst of a turbulent society. Instead of valuing the technical achievement of the "itinerant panegyrist," Ferguson focuses on those verses in which he finds strong feeling and direct expression, presenting those bards driven by passion, if lacking in Anglo-Saxon refinement. For this reason, he naturally condemns what he calls the "Pindaricized" and "greekified" translations of Hardiman's translating team.[25] To buttress his case, he condemns the Gaelic panegyrics Hardiman valued and celebrates instead the sentimental love poems that do not parade the "artificial pedantries of the professional poet" but reveal rather the "savage sincerity," "simple sincerity. . . the freshness of honest affection…of the rustic lover".[26] To represent indigenous Irish identity, Ferguson was less interested in the court bard than the rustic poet of the country, less interested in the formal components of the lyrics, of balance and proportion, of restraint—those classical characteristics that for Hardiman epitomize the stability of the civilization that produced it.

Ferguson produced four review articles that roughly correspond to the four sections of Hardiman's work: songs by the eighteenth-century harpist Carolan, sentimental songs (which are mostly anonymous love songs), patriotic and national songs from the Jacobite wars, and more formal odes

[25] Ferguson, "Hardiman's Irish Minstrelsy—No. III," *Dublin University Magazine*, 4, no. 22 (October 1834), 455.
[26] Ferguson, "Hardiman's Irish Minstrelsy—No. II," *Dublin University Magazine*, 4, no. 20 (August 1834), 165.

and elegies drawn from a much greater period of time. Ferguson is straightforward about his apparent inductive method for determining the essential characteristics of Irish poetry and by extension Irish identity:

> What we mean by Irish sentiment, we hope to show in the progress of our notices; and we can execute our purpose only by adhering to the strict severity of literal translation. We have exemplified Irish adulation, Irish whimsicality, and Irish fun and jollity in the songs of Carolan, with a fidelity painful to ourselves, as it was derogatory from the character so long reflected on Carolan's poetic, from his musical talent. [27]

Ferguson is convinced that he can achieve a transparent rendering of the original meaning, a fidelity gained through literal translation. Interestingly, he derives many of these essential aspects of the Irish character from Carolan's drinking songs, which are found in the addenda to Part I of Hardiman's collection. In addition to these fun-loving songs of inebriation, Ferguson turns also to Irish love songs, found for the most part in Part II of Hardiman's book, that he felt best register the true genius of the Irish, in those verses by humble men living close to nature. He discusses several amatory lyrics of anonymous poets, drawing rude and even clownish portraits by extrapolating selective, minute details from the poems. For example, he characterizes the anonymous poet who composed "Song of Sorrow" as "a fugitive rebel," and Costello, the poet of "Roiseen Dubh," as a disheveled and "pining friar." Similarly, using a minute reference to a cloak from a poem, Ferguson maintains that the anonymous poet of "Molly Astore" was "not much above the rank of a peasant" living, as he claims, "a life rude".[28] From these songs, Ferguson exemplifies what he calls "the pathetic principle" of Irish poetry. Ferguson makes his characteristic generalization about ancient Irish poetry: "the mere Irishman gave utterance to the best feelings of his nature. He promises no more than love and constancy, but he promises them as man never did before".[29] Intense feeling, however, can overwhelm reason, that classical (and Anglo-Irish) virtue that Hardiman emphasizes and that Ferguson denies as an attribute of the native Irish. The natural genius of these national songs, contain

> that paramount supremacy of feeling so conspicuous in every line of their passionate love songs; that ascendency of the heart; that rush of hot blood

[27] Ibid., 154.
[28] Ibid., 161.
[29] Ibid., 166.

> to the head which smothered the apoplectic intellect, and left the Irish lover blind, deaf, and swooning at the feet of one idea.[30]

Similarly, in 1834 Ferguson writes of this pathetic principle of Irishness in *Dublin University Magazine*, a characteristic sentiment that sets Irish verse a part from other natural literatures:

> there is nothing impure, nothing licentious in their languishing but *savage sincerity*. This is the one great characteristic of all the amatory poetry of the *country;* and in its association with the despondency of conscious degradation, and the recklessness of desperate content, is partly to be found the origin of that *wild, mournful, incondite*, yet not uncouth, sentiment which distinguishes the national songs of Ireland from those of perhaps any other nation in the world.[31]

Ferguson focuses on lamentations or love songs, rather than themes that might prove politically inflamatory.[32] And, although he praises what he sees as valued features of this poetry, his analysis, taken in the context of Hardiman's assertions, exhibit arrogant condescension. Compared with Hardiman, who emphasizes the classical dignity of Gaelic song, Ferguson prefers those lyrics that he finds a little rough around the edges, and imagines a less civilized, more raw Irish identity than Hardiman.

Ferguson further challenges Hardiman regarding Irish history by sampling from Gaelic lyrics and by taking liberties in imagining for the poems poignant portraits of several of the poets. For these portraits, Ferguson must rely upon ingenuity rather than fact, since the poems are anonymous and no biographical information is available. Like Chaucer in his *Prologue* to *The Canterbury Tales*, Ferguson provides an amusing gallery of Irish bards as eccentric inebriates, rustic rogues, sentimental rustics. Because of their concrete details, these portraits create an immediacy with each bard, thereby eclipsing wider historical concerns--such as the results of English domination--that Hardiman had discussed to contextualize the poetry. However affectionately Ferguson imagines these versifiers, his pastoral images of the men who sing their woes of love, he appears to have clear political objectives in mind: he is drawing a

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[30] Ibid., 161.

[31] Ibid., 154.

[32] See Malcolm Brown (59) on Ferguson's partiality in the poems he selects to translate, avoiding those that might be politically explosive. For Ferguson's analysis of Hardiman's thesis, see especially the second installment of his review, "Hardiman's Irish Minstrelsy—No.II," *Dublin University Magazine* 4 (August 1834), 159-167.

historical portrait of not only a poet but of a people, a portrait that counters and revises Hardiman's depiction of an established, civilized culture. Ferguson's sentimental portraits depict for his readers a raw Irish race and culture, a less evolved civilization.

An important assumption about Ireland's historical development begins to emerge in the third part of Ferguson's review of Hardiman, a theme that is sustained in much of Ferguson's writings in the 1830s. Eve Patten's study emphasizes the influence of ideas of the Scottish Enlightenment on Ferguson's understanding of cultural development.[33] Most significant for our discussion is the view of historical development that he inherited a belief that the progress of civilization evolved in distinct stages. Thus the advancement or retardation of a particular civilization (Ireland) can be determined, measured against these stages. A civilization's cultural productions can also be situated on a scale of development to determine its degree of progress. This historical approach to civilization, as we will see, directly affected the way in which Ferguson assessed Ireland's level of economic, governmental, and cultural predicament.

As with his work with Carolan, Ferguson begins this particular study of the Irish character by locating in ancient Irish lyrics what he sees as a persisting and excessive "natural piety," a racial characteristic that prevented the native Irish from becoming "a truly integral and influential portion of the empire":

> all obstructive influences heretofore, are referable to the excess alone of a quality of the national character, in itself most amiable, and if not peculiarly obnoxious, at least not adverse to salutary modification. It is the *excess* of natural piety, developing itself in *over* loyal attachment to principles subversive of reason and independence, that we would trace the tardiness, nay, sometimes retrogression of civilization and prosperity in Ireland. (my emphasis)[34]

Ferguson defines natural piety as a constitution of Irish character, which is the religion of humanity, the faith of the affections, the susceptibility of involuntary attachments to arbitrary relations in society…most favourable to legitimate religious impressions, were it not that [in the case of the

[33] See the chapter one, "Scotland, Ulster and the *Hibernian Nights' Entertainments*," of Patten's study.

[34] Ferguson,"Hardiman's Irish Minstrelsy--No. III," *Dublin University Magazine*, 4, no. 22 (October 1834), 448. For Ferguson's program for supplying "salutary modification" or "wholesome knowledge" through spiritual education, see especially page 451 of this same article.

Irish] its *superabundance* of devotion too often runs to waste on sublunary or superstitious and dissipating objects.[35] (my emphasis)

While this tendency of towards "natural piety," as he attempts to demonstrate, is related to the loyalty and devotion that the Irish maintain for their Catholicism, their clan, their chieftain, Ferguson argues that an excess this apparent virtue undermines economic and social development. As the above passage indicates, it can lead to "over loyal attachments to principles subversive of reason and independence." Like the pathetic principle, the natural piety of the Catholic Irish prevents them from developing intellectually and rationally as a culture at large. And in the past, it has prevented the development of Irish civilization.

In the above description, Ferguson leaves room for the "salutary modification" effected through the intellectual leaders of Ireland, the Ascendancy his *Magazine* readers would assume. Piety and loyalty are necessary ingredients for the state, but thus far the Irish piety has hindered religious development, i.e. a Reformation. This Irish disposition manifests itself in history—for Ferguson-- as a lack of reason, an inability for negotiation and compromise, and has always been evident in dealings with one another. Ferguson's gross depiction of the Irish as a stubborn "jackass" in his early poem, "An Irish Garland," corresponds with the portrait drawn from the Gaelic poems. According to Ferguson, this refusal to compromise, to stick by one's guns at the expense of reason, to remain dedicated to some however misguided cause, is a primary concern, one he shared with many of the writers for *Blackwood's* and *Dublin University Magazine*. They anticipated a national crisis created by Emancipation and Reform, which spelled, some believed, the demise of Empire, Church and the class founded upon them. In one of his examples of clan feuds and warfare, the "War of Turlogh" (1834), Ferguson illustrates his "subject of factious unanimity in the midst of national dissension" providing an account of the feud between the two great septs of the O'Briens, in which Clan O'Brien Roe was finally overcome by Clan Turlogh after a strife of fifty years .[36] Ferguson uses such examples from Irish history to illustrate his conviction about how Irish natural piety manifests itself in political and cultural terms.

As Ferguson called for reason to counterbalance this piety in the socio-political realm, so Irish poetry can achieve something extraordinary when this natural quality does not dominate the other features. Ferguson's treatment of the bard, O'Hussey, in his devotion to his chief, Hugh

[35] Ibid., 448.
[36] Ibid., 461.

Maguire, is explained in these terms. Ferguson praises O'Hussey for the "savage power" of his heroic ode to his chief, but particularly for his difference from all other Irish bards who have always sacrificed the proper use of language and images to native, raw emotion. His ode is unusual since it possesses

> a new interest in our papers, for it is the first our readers have yet met, in which description has not been altogether *sacrificed to sentiment*. But O'Hussey's descriptions are not pervaded by intense sentiment, and here there is no sacrifice of either—a *rare* conjunction of felicities in Irish Song. [37] (my emphasis)

Ferguson's point about O'Hussey's uniqueness is followed by further examples of excessive piety and clan feuding, using for his sampling the "Jacobite relicts" of Hardiman's collection. O'Hussey represents the potential for a native's art when disciplined to balance feeling with art, emotion with reason. Thus, Ferguson emphasizes the potential for the colonized Irish that can be realized when synthesized with Anglo-Saxon virtues.

After providing other similar literary examples, Ferguson concludes this third essay by deriving a moral from Irish history to apply to Ireland of the present:

> On concluding such a record of misplaced and insulated loyalty, obstructing its own exercise by its own excess, and pressing valour and fortitude which should have been applied to the preservation of the country, into the vexatious service of petty feuds and self-consuming factions, who can avoid lamenting the perversion of so noble, but so dangerous, a quality in the Irish heart? Had it centered on a monarch, it would have given the means of a vigorous and healthy government; but it never centered on a monarch; nothing but the tremendous engine of Roman Catholicism could ever collect or fix it.[38]

Thus, Ferguson's project is not only to discover the literary qualities of Irish bardic poetry, or to criticize Hardiman's translations and bald nationalist politics; he uses his own assessments of Irish poetry to help establish for his Anglo-Irish readers of The *Dublin University Magazine* his own seemingly empirically-based cultural agenda. He attempts to demonstrate inductively through specific examples the need for

[37] Ibid., 458.
[38] Ibid., 463.

Ascendancy leadership.[39] Because, he suggests, the Irish by their very nature are excessively pious, he will demonstrate the development of that sentiment in its "different degrees and qualities of attachment or reverence, as exhibited in Mr. Hardiman's collections".[40] Where Hardiman had used the poetry to support the nationalist cause, Ferguson, uses many of the same poems to support Unionist convictions. He selects lyrics from Hardiman's own work -- poems by Torna and O'Hussey and others -- to demonstrate a volatile culture. In this way, Ferguson effectively reverses the significance of ancient literature for his own present day. The Catholic culture Hardiman had celebrated is criticized by Ferguson for its piety: "the development of whose influence in the different relations of [excessive] loyalty to the chief, to the clan, to the king, to the church, and to the country" had created strife, feuds and that militated against Ireland ever becoming a nation on its own (456).[41] Ferguson in this way appropriates these poems to buttress his own cultural agenda.

In a further effort to depict an authentic tradition and to analyze the quality of the people and culture that produced this tradition, Ferguson must situate his characterizations in the wider context of historical development. Hardiman and Ferguson each assert different causes for

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[39] Ferguson's emphasis on the emotional instability of the Celt is consistent with the *Magazine's* Burkean unionism. Edmund Burke, in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, clarifies the role of the State as a necessary agent of human perfection, especially in regards to restraining passion:

> Government is a contrivance of human wisdom to provide for human *wants* . . . . Among these wants is to be reckoned the want, out of civil society, of a sufficient restraint upon their passions. Society requires not only that the passions of individuals should be subjected, but that even in the mass and body, as well as in the individuals, the inclinations of men should be thwarted, their will controlled, and their passions brought into subjection. This can only be done by a power out of themselves; and not, in the exercise of its function, subject to that will and to those passions which it is its office to bridle and subdue. In this sense the restraints on men, as well as their liberties, are to be reckoned among their rights. (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987), 52-3.

[40] Ferguson,"Hardiman's Irish Minstrelsy--No. III," *Dublin University Magazine*, 4, no. 22 (October 1834), 448.

[41] Ibid., 456.

cultural discontinuity in Ireland.[42] For Hardiman, invasion, dispossession, and institutionalized prejudice disrupted and consistently sabotaged the already advanced Gaelic culture. For Ferguson, it was the racial constitution of the Irish that inhibited cultural development. He maintains that Ireland's arrested development can be entirely explained by the inherent make-up of the native Irish. Ferguson uses again the figure of the bard to represent or to register the larger cultural changes of Irish antiquity. For example, writing of Turlogh O'Carolan, Ferguson explains:

> With all his faults, and circumstance had given him his share, Turlogh O'Carolan was a man not unworthy to be the last bard of Ireland, for since his day the character has been extinct. The office of the bard had undergone a sad decline in the two generations immediately preceding his. He was the flicker of the expiring light, and all has been darkness since.[43]

Similarly, on the demise of the office of the bard, Ferguson writes: "Here let us correct ourselves. It must rather have been from the decrease of the fashion, than from want of means, that the Irish gentry did not keep up the household bard."[44]

If the decline of the bard signified for Ferguson a civilization that could not sustain its interest in the arts, for Hardiman his demise represented evidence of foreign invasion and oppression. For Ferguson it indicated just another instance that Irish native culture was unable to sustain itself independently, a fact of the Irish racial constitution that Ferguson believed continued up to his present day.

Ferguson denies Hardiman's claims, for example, that the penal laws inhibited Gaelic culture. In fact, he reprimands Hardiman for alluding to institutional oppression, noting that Emancipation was granted a full two or three years earlier than Hardiman's publication.[45] He expresses here no sympathy for the Irish colonial predicament, but rather attributes their cultural discontinuity to stagnation, feuds, stubbornness, ignorance, and finally, as we have already seen, "extreme piety."

One of Ferguson's themes throughout his review is that Hardiman's "spirit of petty anti-Anglicanism sought to be imparted by Mr. Hardiman

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[42] For a current analysis of Ireland's cultural discontinuity, see the introductory chapter of Philip O'Leary's study, *The Prose Literature of the Gaelic Revival* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Penn State Press, 1994).

[43] Ferguson's " Hardiman's Irish Minstrelsy—No.I," *Dublin University Magazine*, 3, no. 16 (April 1834), 477.

[44] Ibid., 469.

[45] Ferguson, "Hardiman's Irish Minstrelsy—No.IV," *Dublin University Magazine*, 4, no. 23 (November 1834), 522.

throughout these annotations, is highly prejudiced to the best interests of the country. . . . He certainly holds out no very alluring prospect of reconciliation".[46] Ferguson condemns what he calls Hardiman's "schemes of dissension," his attempts to "affect the monopoly of native Irish sympathies, and standing between the aristocracy and the people, to intercept the best charities of society" .[47] Similarly he complains: "Mr. Hardiman has interposed himself between us and our countrymen at large".[48] In response to Hardiman's annotations that catalogued the oppression of the native Irish that had fragmented Irish culture, Ferguson counters Hardiman's version of history with his own reasons for cultural discontinuity. In his final review of Hardiman's work, he takes the writer to task for his own "Philosophy of History," quoting Hardiman's account of Irish reputation for idleness and intemperance:

> It is well known (he says) that, in former times, Ireland was distinguished for temperance and sobriety. At more recent periods it has become noted for some of the opposite vices, the consequences of English domination and of the penal laws. This pernicious custom…is but of late growth in Ireland. It originated among an impoverished people, who were sunk and degraded in their own estimation, by the operation of laws founded upon bigotry and administered with partiality and injustice.[49]

In response, Ferguson cites examples of legendary inebriates from Irish antiquity, all of whom preceded the destruction of the old Irish families by Cromwell, Charles II, and William III. Ferguson draws a gallery of drunks, citing examples with burlesque flair:

> We will not insist on the case of Murtach MacEre, who drowned himself in the wine-butt in Sletty on the Boyne, five hundred and thirty-four years before Christ, nor on that of Shane O'Neill who used to drink Usquebagh till he had to be sunk in a bag to carry off the fever, nor on that of Hugh Roe O'Donnell, who swilled himself into the dungeons of Dublin Castle at one stoop, nor even on the testimony of our old friend, Captain Bodley, fifty years before Cromwell brewed.[50]

Ferguson seems to be relying upon the efficacy of levity and comic description to counter Hardiman's pathos, to push the historical tragedies

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[46] Ferguson, "Hardiman's Irish Minstrelsy—No.IV," *Dublin University Magazine*, 4, no. 23 (November 1834), 515.
[47] Ibid., 516.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Ibid. 518.
[50] Ibid., 519.