



The Destruction of Da Derga's Hostel

Whitley Stokes

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Whitley Stokes (28 February 1830 – 13 April 1909) was an Irish lawyer and Celtic scholar. Stokes studied Irish, Breton and Cornish texts as materials for comparative philology, learning Old Irish and Middle Irish. In the hundred years since his death he has continued to be a central figure in Celtic scholarship. Many of his editions have not been superseded in that time and his total output in Celtic studies comes to over 15,000 pages.

The Destruction of Da Derga's Hostel is an Irish tale belonging to the Ulster Cycle of Irish mythology. It recounts the birth, life, and death of Conaire Mór son of Eterscél Mór, a legendary High King of Ireland, who is killed at Da Derga's hostel by his enemies when he breaks his geasa. It is considered one of the finest Irish sagas of the early period, comparable to the better-known Táin Bó Cúailnge.

The theme of gathering doom, as the king is forced through circumstances to break one after another of his taboos, is non-Christian in essence, and no Christian interpretations are laid upon the marvels that it relates. In its repetitions and verbal formulas the poem retains the qualities of oral transmission. The tone of the work has been compared with Greek tragedy.

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