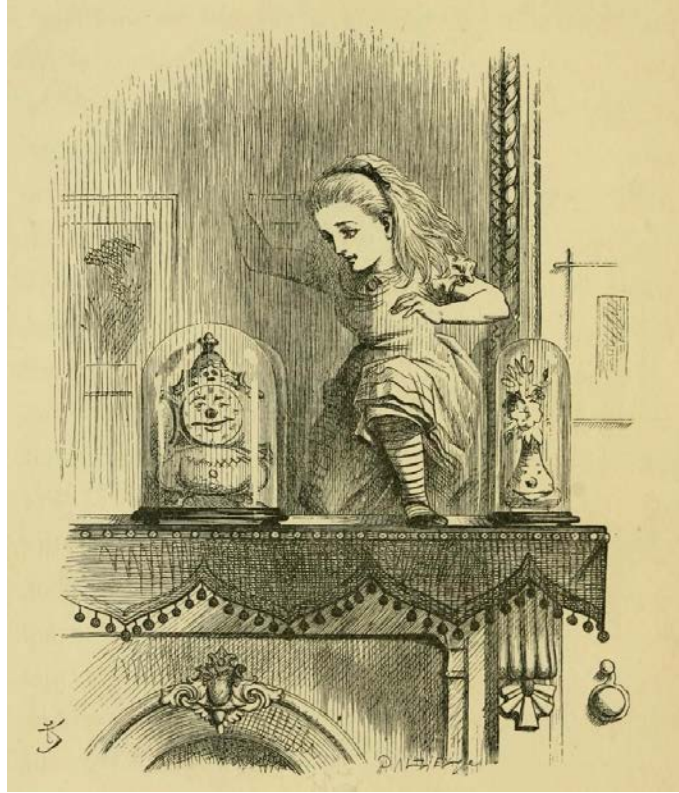


# **History and memory through the looking glass: When does forgetting begin?**

Professor Guy Beiner, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev



Lewis Carroll,  
*Through the Looking Glass  
and What Alice Found There*

'I don't understand you,' said Alice. 'It's dreadfully confusing!'

'That's the effect of living backwards,' the Queen said kindly: 'it always makes one a little giddy at first —'

'Living backwards!' Alice repeated in great astonishment. 'I never heard of such a thing!'

'— but there's one great advantage in it, that **one's memory works both ways.**'

'I'm sure mine only works one way,' Alice remarked. 'I can't remember things before they happen.'

'**It's a poor sort of memory that only works backwards,**' the Queen remarked.

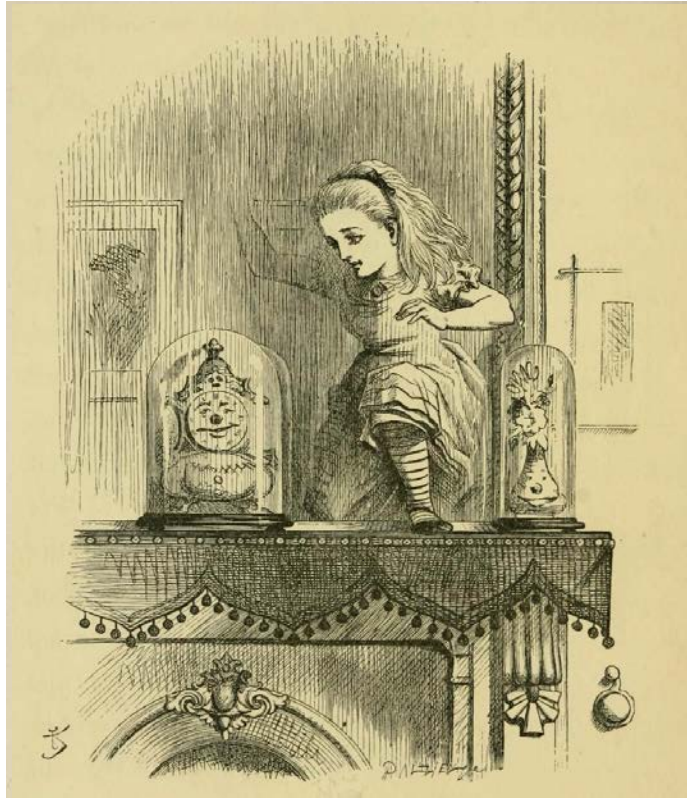
'What sort of things do you remember best?' Alice ventured to ask.

'Oh, things that happened the week after next,' the Queen replied in a careless tone. 'For instance, now,' she went on, sticking a large piece of plaster on her finger as she spoke, 'there's the King's Messenger. He's in prison now, being punished: and the trial doesn't even begin till next Wednesday: and of course the crime comes last of all.'

'Suppose he never commits the crime?' said Alice.

'That would be all the better, wouldn't it?' the Queen said, as she bound the plaster round her finger with a bit of ribbon.

Alice felt there was no denying that. 'Of course it would be all the better,' she said: 'but it wouldn't be all the better his being punished.'



“one’s memory works both ways . . .

It’s a poor sort of memory that only works backwards.”

Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There*

Nous entrons dans l’avenir à reculons

[We move into the future backwards.]

Paul Valéry, *Variété IV*

*Ka mua, ka muri*

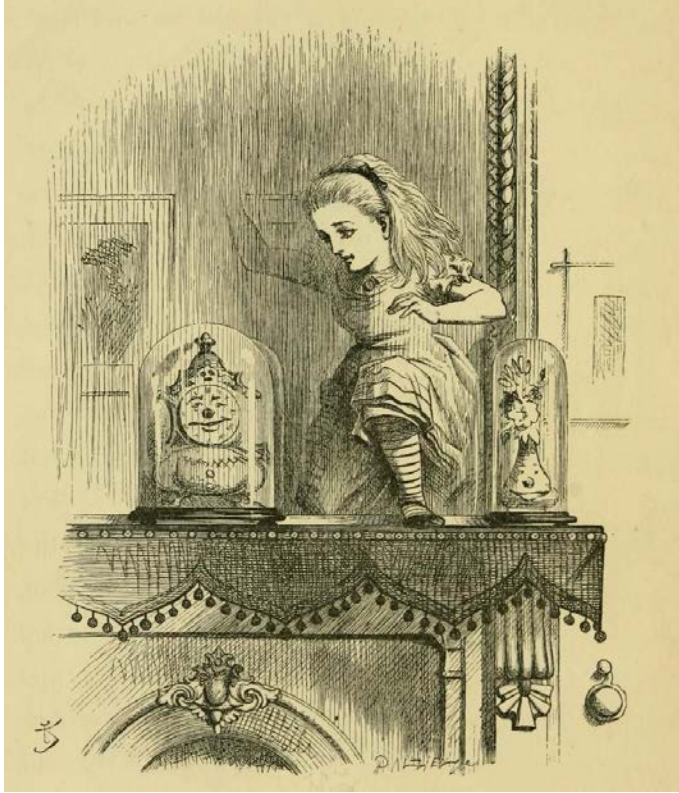
[Walking backwards into the future]

Māori proverb



History  $\Rightarrow$  Memory  $\Rightarrow$  Forgetting





History  $\Rightarrow$  Memory  $\Rightarrow$  Forgetting

?

Memory  $\Rightarrow$  History  $\Rightarrow$  Forgetting

Forgetting  $\Rightarrow$  Memory  $\Rightarrow$  History

**Prememory**

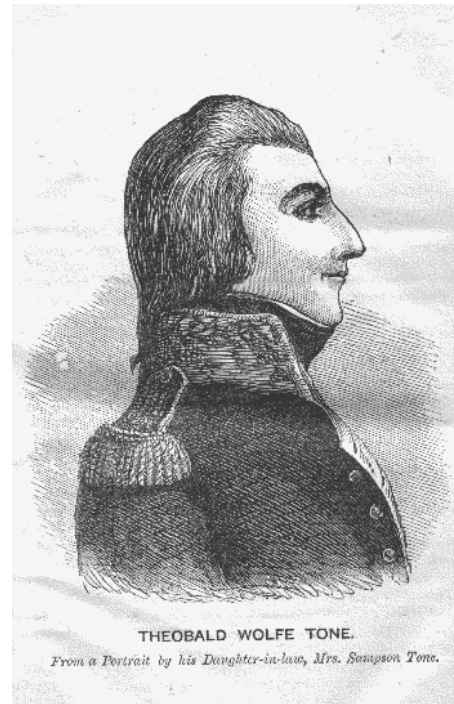
**Pre-forgetting**

# Prememory & Pre-Forgetting



Walter C. Mills, 'The Death of Wolfe Tone', *Irish Weekly Independent*, December 1897

“The father of Irish republicanism”

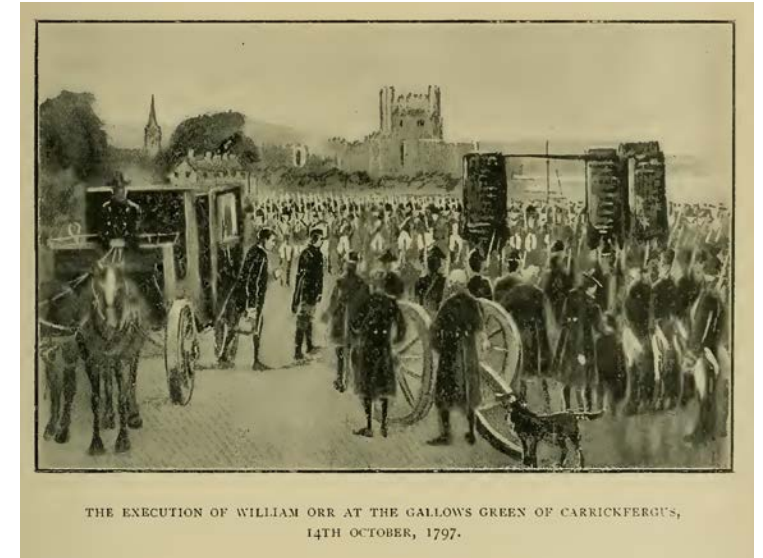


Theobald Wolfe Tone

republican protomartyr



William Orr



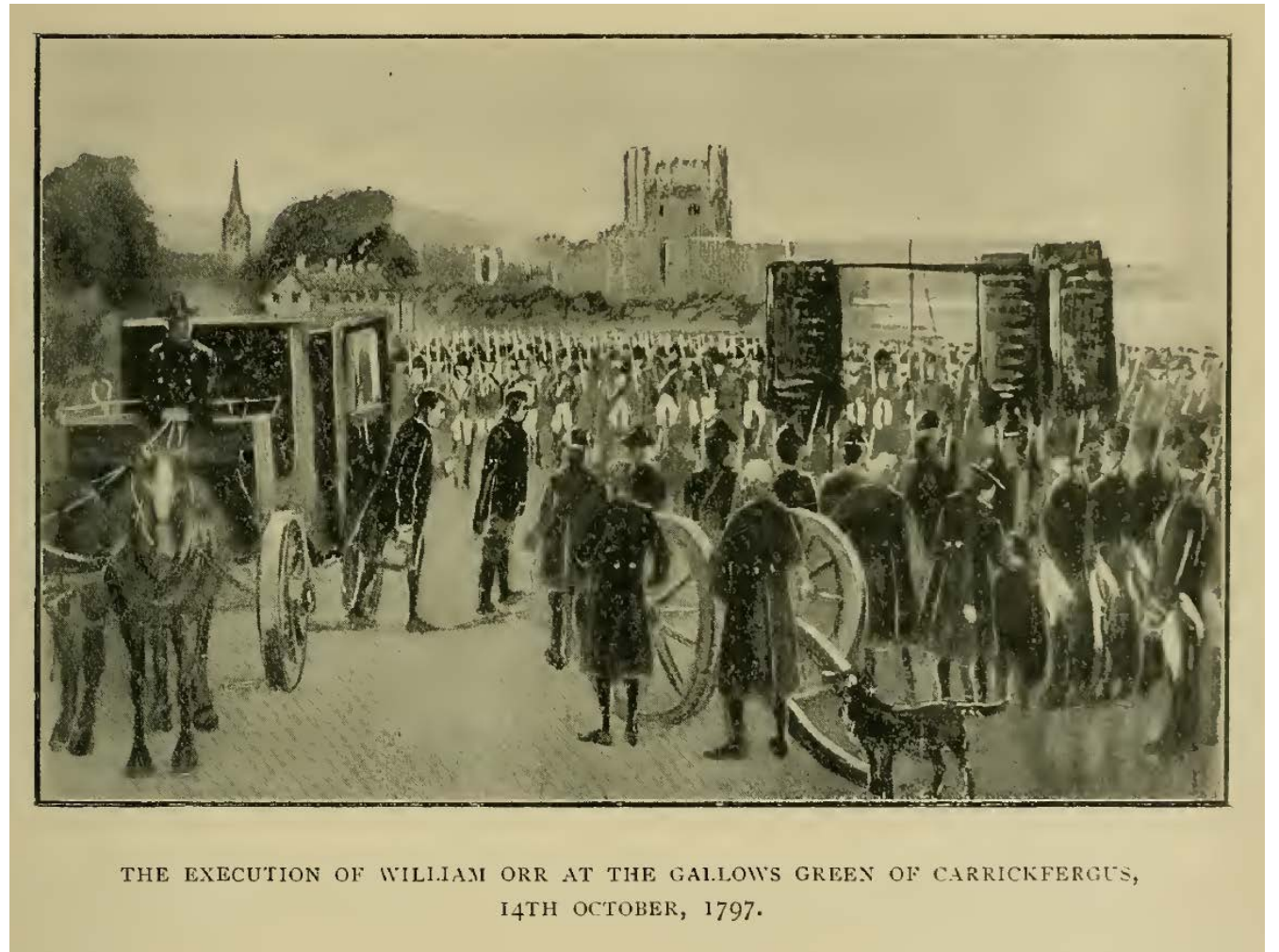
Templepatrick, Co. Antrim

Bodenstown, Co. Kildare

# Prememory & Pre-Forgetting

**William Orr**

The United Irish Protomartyr  
executed 1797



Francis Joseph Bigger,  
*Remember Orr* (Dublin, 1906)

# Prememory & Pre-Forgetting

**William Orr**  
The United Irish Protomartyr  
executed 1797

I trust that all my virtuous countrymen will bear me in their kind remembrance,

Francis Joseph Bigger,  
*Remember Orr* (Dublin, 1906)

## The Dying Declaration

OF  
WILLIAM ORR,

Of Farranshane, in the County of Antrim, Farmer.

TO THE PUBLIC,—MY FRIENDS AND COUNTRYMEN :—In the Thirty-first year of my Life, I have been sentenced to die upon the Gallows, and this Sentence has been in pursuance of a Verdict of Twelve men, who should have been indifferently and impartially chosen: how far they have been so, I leave to that Country from which they have been chosen to determine: and how far they have discharged their Duty, I leave to their God and to themselves.—They have, in pronouncing their verdict, thought proper to recommend me as an Object of humane Mercy; in return, I pray to God, if they have erred, to have Mercy upon them. The Judge, who condemned me, humanely shed tears in uttering my Sentence; but whether he did wisely, in so highly commending the wretched Informer, who swore away my Life, I leave to his own cool reflection, solemnly assuring him and all the World, with my dying Breath, that the Informer was forsworn. The Law under which I suffer is surely a severe one; may the Makers and Promoters of it be justified in the Integrity of their Motives and the Purity of their own Lives—by that Law, I am stamped a Felon, but my heart disdains the Imputation. My comfortable Lot and Industrious Course of Life best refute the Charge of being an Adventurer for Plunder; but if to have loved my Country, to have known its Wrongs, to have felt the Injuries of the persecuted Catholics, and to have united with them and all other Religious Persuasions, in the most orderly and least sanguinary Means of procuring Redress;—If these be Felonies, I am a Felon, but not otherwise. Had my Counsel (for whose honourable Exertions I am indebted) prevailed in their Motion to have me tried for High Treason, rather than under the *Insurrection Law*, I should have been entitled then to a full Defence and my Actions and Intentions have been better vindicated; but that was refused, and I must now submit to what has passed.

To the generous Protection of my Country, I leave a beloved Wife, who has been constant and true to me, and whose Grief for my fate has already nearly occasioned her Death. I leave five living Children, who have been my Delight—may they love their Country as I have done, and die for it, if needful.

Lastly, a false and ungenerous Publication having appeared in a Newspaper, stating certain alleged Confessions of Guilt on my Part, and thus striking at my Reputation, which is dearer to me than Life, I take this solemn Method of contradicting that Calumny,—I was applied to by the High Sheriff, and the Rev. William Bristow, Sovereign of Belfast, to make a confession of guilt, who used entreaties to that effect; this I peremptorily refused; did I think myself guilty, I should be free to confess it, but, on the contrary, I glory in my

I trust that all my virtuous countrymen will bear me in their kind remembrance, and continue true and faithful to each other, as I have been to all of them. With this last Wish of my Heart, nothing doubting of the Success of that Cause for which I suffer, and hoping for God's merciful Forgiveness of such Offences as my frail Nature may have at any Time betrayed me into, I die in Peace and Charity with all Mankind.

WILLIAM ÓRR.

Carrickfergus Gaol, 5 October, 1797.



# Prememory & Pre-Forgetting

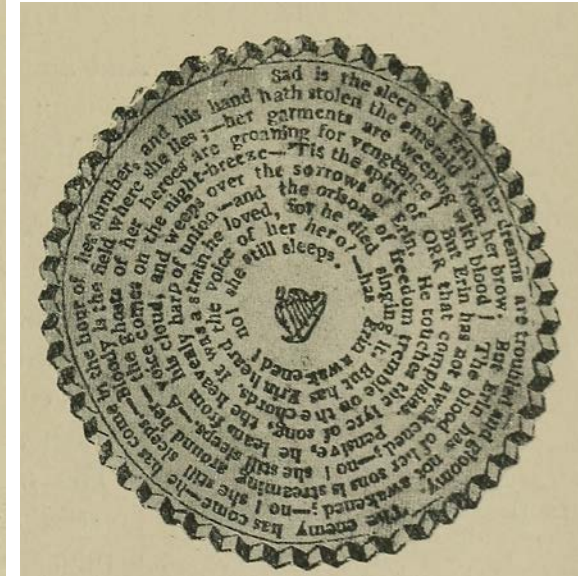
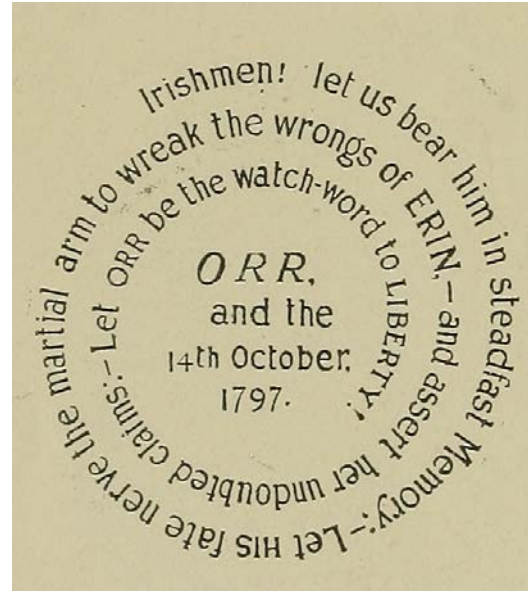
**William Orr**

The United Irish Protomartyr  
executed 1797

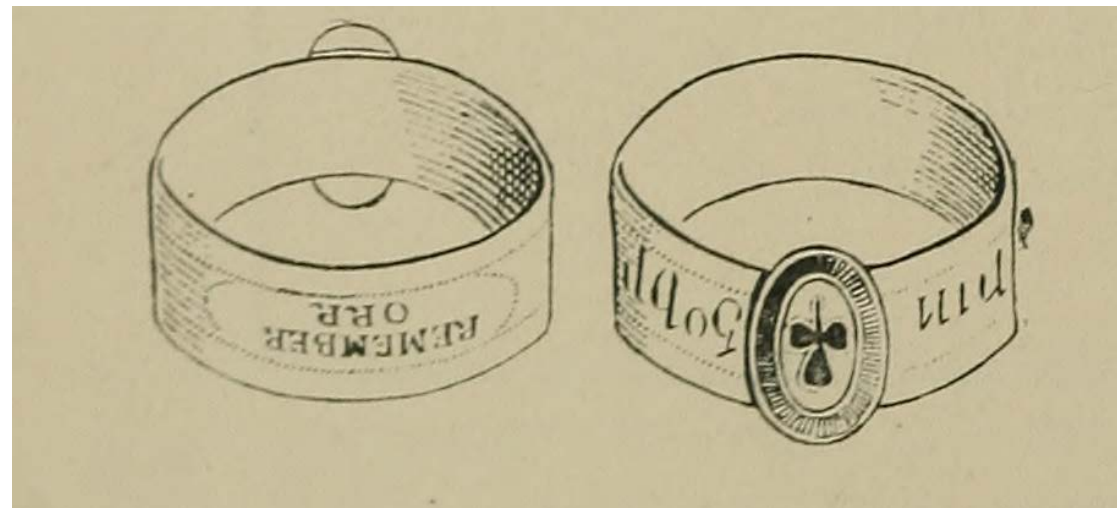
“Remember Orr”

**Prememory**  
template / schema

Francis Joseph Bigger,  
*Remember Orr* (Dublin, 1906)



memorial  
silk  
rosettes



memorial  
ring

# Prememory & Pre-Forgetting

**William Orr**  
The United Irish Protomartyr  
executed 1797

O ! Children of ERIN ! when ye *forget* HIM,  
his Wrongs, his death, his Cause,  
the injur'd RIGHTS of MAN ;

“Remember Orr”

May you be debar'd THAT LIBERTY he sought,  
and *forgotten* in the Hist'ry of Nations ;

**Pre-forgetting**

Francis Joseph Bigger,  
*Remember Orr* (Dublin, 1906)

SACRED  
To the Memory of  
WILLIAM ORR,  
Who was offer'd up at Carrickfergus, on Saturday,  
the 14th of October, 1797 :  
an awful sacrifice to  
IRISH FREEDOM,  
on the *Altar of British Tyranny*,  
by the hands of *Perjury*,  
thro' the influence of *Corruption*  
and the Connivance of  
*PARTIAL JUSTICE !!*  
O ! Children of ERIN ! when ye *forget* HIM,  
his Wrongs, his death, his Cause,  
the injur'd RIGHTS of MAN ;  
nor these revenge :—  
May you be debar'd THAT LIBERTY he sought,  
and *forgotten* in the Hist'ry of Nations :  
or, if remember'd,  
remember'd with disgust and execration,  
or nam'd with scorn and horror !  
No, Irishmen ! let us bear him in steadfast Memory ;  
Let HIS fate nerve the martial arm  
to wreak the Wrongs of  
ERIN,  
and assert her undoubted Claims :—  
Let ORR be the watch-word to LIBERTY !

memorial  
card

# **Pre-Forgetting**

**Historical events are perceived through the 'prememory' of reference to memories of previous events.**

**Concerns of being forgotten, though often unnoticed, can be raised in advance of the unravelling of historical events and their remembrance.**

**Hence, forgetting can paradoxically precede history and memory.**

# Pre-Forgetting



Francis Joseph Bigger,  
*Remember Orr* (Dublin, 1906)

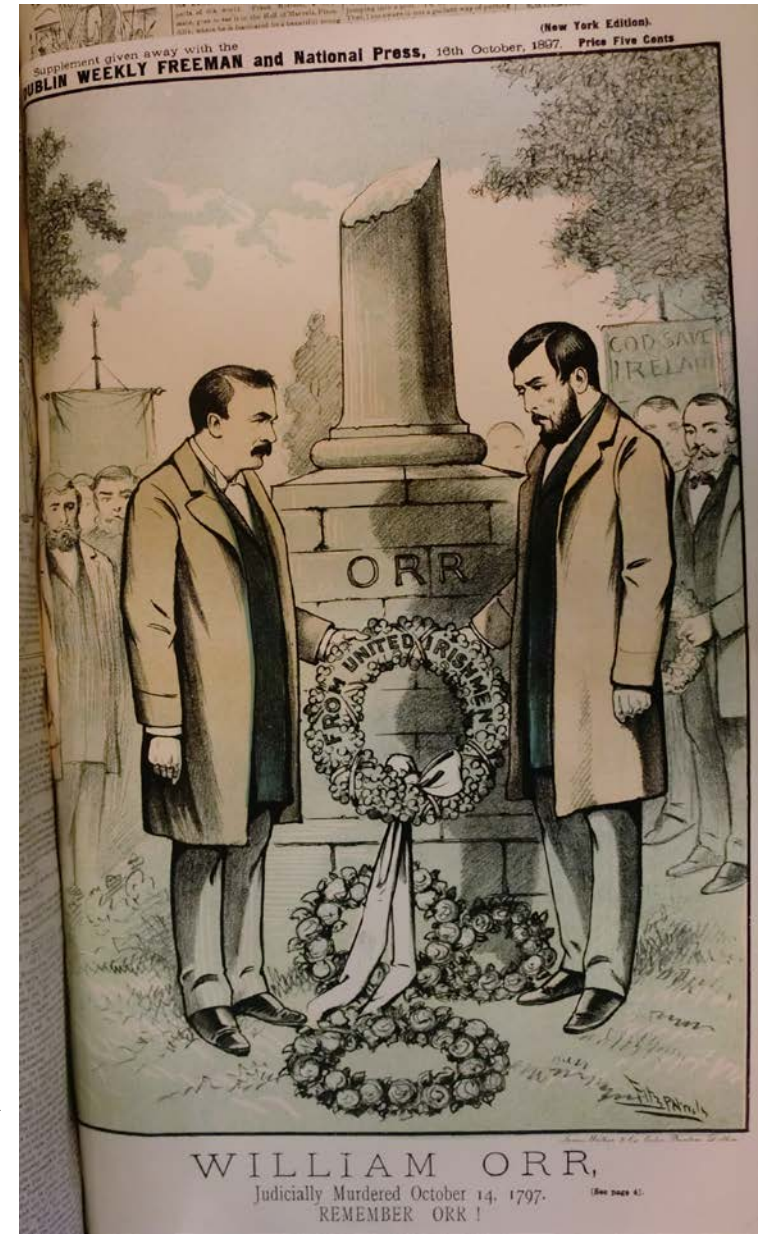


'98 Centenary Committee, *The Story of William Orr* (Dublin, 1898).

Bicentenary  
post-forgetting (?)

# Commemoration

Centenary  
prememory



Thomas Fitzpatrick  
*Weekly Freeman*,  
16 October 1897