

THE LATIN COLOPHON TO THE 'TÁIN BÓ CÚAILNGE' IN THE  
BOOK OF LEINSTER: A CRITICAL VIEW OF OLD IRISH LITERATURE

PROFESSOR Carney will long be remembered for his views on the origins of Old-Irish literature.<sup>1</sup> And while his thesis that it is essentially a product of Latin ecclesiastical learning has not won general acceptance,<sup>2</sup> the reactions provoked by his work have served to focus attention on the role of the monastic schools in cultivating that literature. Indeed, there is now general agreement that these centres were the primary custodians of written Old-Irish literature, preserving and transmitting it in manuscript form from as early as the seventh century.<sup>3</sup> And when the end of that tradition came some five centuries later, it was marked by a final burst of scribal activity in the monasteries of central and eastern Ireland. Thus, the great manuscript collections of the twelfth century, *Lebor na hUidre* (Clonmacnoise; c.1100),<sup>4</sup> the Bodleian Library MS Rawlinson B 502 (Glendalough; c.1130),<sup>5</sup> and the Book of Leinster (Terryglass; c.1150),<sup>6</sup> all bear witness to the monastic role in preserving native Irish literature.

Given this long tradition of institutional support, it comes as a surprise to encounter at the end of the Book of Leinster (LL) text of the *Táin Bó Cúailnge* a scribal colophon that strikes a discordant and individualistic note:

Sed ego qui scripsi hanc historiam aut uerius fabulam quibusdam fidem in hac historia aut fabula non accommodo. Quaedam enim ibi sunt praestrigia demonum. quaedam autem figmenta poetica. quaedam similia uero. quaedam non. Quaedam ad delectationem stultorum.<sup>7</sup>

It would be easy to dismiss the criticisms expressed here, especially the derisive tone of the final words, as the unfavourable reaction of a prudish, narrow-minded cleric to the pagan themes and stylistic excesses of the tale which he had just copied.

<sup>1</sup> *Studies in Irish literature and history* (Dublin 1955), esp. chap. 8 (pp. 276–323).

<sup>2</sup> See the criticisms of K. H. Jackson, 'The Sources for the Life of St Kentigern', in N. K. Chadwick et al. (ed.), *Studies in the Early British Church* (Cambridge 1958) 273–357, appendix II (pp. 350–7); D. A. Binchy, 'Varia Hibernica,' in H. Pilch and R. Thurow (ed.), *Indo-Celtica* (Munich 1972) 29–41, esp. pp. 29–34; and P. Mac Cana, 'On the Use of the term *retoiricé*', *Celtica* 7 (1966) 65–90, pp. 82–8; and 'Mongán Mac Fiachna and *Immram Brain*', *Ériu* 23 (1972) 102–42, pp. 118–26. But see now Kim McCone, *Pagan past and Christian present in Early Irish literature* (Maynooth [1990] repr. 1991), *passim*, for an enthusiastic endorsement of Carney's views.

<sup>3</sup> D. A. Binchy, 'The Background to Old Irish Literature', *Studia Hibernica* 1 (1960) 1–18 (esp. pp. 10, 12), argues that the native schools of *filid* must also have recorded their *senchas* in writing. However, no identifiable evidence of this activity has survived.

<sup>4</sup> See R. I. Best and O. Bergin (ed.), *Lebor na hUidre: Book of the Dun Cow* (Dublin 1929) xii–xvii; and, most recently, T. Ó Concheanainn, 'The Reviser of Leabhar na hUidhre', *Éigse* 15 (1973–4) 277–88.

<sup>5</sup> P. Ó Riain, 'The Book of Glendalough or Rawlinson B 502', *Éigse* 18 (1981) 161–76, argues that it was written at the monastery of Glendalough.

<sup>6</sup> See R. I. Best, O. Bergin and M. A. O'Brien (ed.), *The Book of Leinster formerly Lebar na Níachongbála I* (Dublin, 1954) xi–xvii; and W. O'Sullivan, 'Notes on the Scripts and Make-Up of the Book of Leinster', *Celtica* 7 (1966) 1–31 (hereafter referred to as: O'Sullivan, 'Notes').

<sup>7</sup> 'But I who have copied this *historia* or, more accurately, *fabula*, do not give credence to certain things in this *historia* or *fabula*. For certain things in it are the illusions of demons; certain are poetic fictions; certain are plausible, certain are not; certain are for the entertainment of fools'. Best and O'Brien, *The Book of Leinster* II, 399, lines 12.416–20. I have not translated the terms *historia* and *fabula* here for reasons which are discussed below, pp. 6–7.

But such a facile interpretation ignores the significance of his technical terminology, and thereby misses the rather complex reactions of a twelfth-century Irish ecclesiastic to his native literature.

First, the immediate context: the author of this colophon in Latin had just finished copying a text of the *Táin*<sup>8</sup> that had its own colophon in Irish calling down a blessing on those who memorized the text and transmitted it unchanged, ‘Bendacht ar cech óen mebraigfes go hindraic Táin amlaid seo 7 ná tuillfe cruth aile furri’.<sup>9</sup> Almost certainly the Irish colophon was composed by the original author of the LL-*Táin*, a man of innovative literary skills who probably worked in the early twelfth century.<sup>10</sup> His authorial request, although partly motivated by self-interest (the fear that readers would tamper with his work, as he himself had done with the traditional text of the *Táin*),<sup>11</sup> appealed to two fundamental pieties of native Irish learning, the accurate memorization and the faithful transmission of traditional tales such as the *Táin*.

His explicit appeal suggests that these pieties could no longer be taken for granted in twelfth-century Ireland among the literate audience for whom he wrote. And indeed one finds evidence elsewhere of a more critical attitude towards native Irish literature. A roughly contemporary work, the *Aislinge Meic Con Glinne* (*AMC*), satirizes and parodies many aspects of traditional Irish learning. The fuller version of this work, probably composed in the last quarter of the eleventh century,<sup>12</sup> tells the story of how the clerical hero Anér Mac Con Glinne frees King Cathal of Munster from his demon of gluttony by reciting to him an angelic vision (*aislinge*). Thereupon the king demands a repeat performance, expressing his approval with words reminiscent of the sentiments contained in the Irish colophon to the LL-*Táin*, ‘Fácbais Cathal rath 7 bendachtu for cach n-oen no-t légf[a]d] 7 no-t lessaigf[e]’.<sup>13</sup> The whole episode is a parody of the native storytelling tradition, specifically its penchant for interminably repeating and unalterably preserving stock tales, and its belief that the recitation of such stories conferred special blessings, both on reciter and audience – the very pieties so earnestly invoked by the author of the LL-*Táin*.<sup>14</sup>

Arguably, it was the latter’s facile appeal which provoked the LL-scribe. In fulfilling his professional duty as a faithful copyist, the LL-scribe could put aside

<sup>8</sup> Except possibly for three pages in the middle, which O’Sullivan argues (‘Notes’, pp. 6 and 9) are in another hand.

<sup>9</sup> ‘A blessing on every one who shall faithfully memorize the *Táin* as it is written here and shall not add any other form to it’. C. O’Rahilly (ed.), *Táin Bó Cúalnge from the Book of Leinster* (Dublin 1967) 136 and 272 (hereafter abbreviated as ‘O’Rahilly, *Táin*’).

<sup>10</sup> R. Thurneysen, *Die irische Helden- und Königsage bis zum siebzehnten Jahrhundert* (Halle, 1921) 113–5, dated him to the first third or even first quarter of the twelfth century. Although Thurneysen’s evidence has been severely criticized, a date of ‘very early twelfth century’ for the compiler is still accepted; see K. H. Jackson (ed.), *Aislinge Meic Con Glinne* (Dublin 1990) xxi.

<sup>11</sup> See R. Thurneysen, *Die irische Helden- und Königsage*, *ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Thus Jackson, *Aislinge*, xx–xxvi, who rejects Meyer’s date of the end of the twelfth century.

<sup>13</sup> ‘Cathal bestowed favour and blessings on every person who would read and preserve it’. Jackson, *Aislinge*, 42, lines 1300–01. J. Strachan, *Ériu* 1 (1904) 172, n.1, comments that this sentence ‘looks like a traditional formula’. The incident does not occur in the other recension.

<sup>14</sup> See Jackson, *Aislinge*, xxxvi–viii. On the presence of this motif in Irish hagiography, see C. Plummer, *Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae* I (Oxford [1910] repr. with corrections, 1968) clxxxviii, n.10.

personal reservations (which subsequently emerge) about the *Táin*, but having to copy the Irish colophon must have proved too much, provoking him to enter his own colophon. He highlights his reaction by physically separating it from the preceding colophon, as if to signify a corresponding mental distancing. Thus, he skips a few lines, supplies a paragraph mark on the margin,<sup>15</sup> and starts with a decorated initial. More significantly, he switches from Irish to Latin. Possibly he did so to distinguish personal comment from public text, or to ensure that his critical comments would be read only by those literate in Latin. But most likely he wished to mark a change of cultural and intellectual register, as if to put his readers on notice that he had switched from the world of traditional vernacular literature to the medium of contemporary ecclesiastical learning.

His immediate reaction, as indicated by the opening *Sed* and the first-person formula *ego qui scripsi* (here denoting copying rather than composing), is adversative and personal: because he has fulfilled the exhortation of the colophon (by faithfully copying the *Táin*) does not mean that he approves either of the traditional values to which it appeals or of the text which it seeks to protect. Concerning the *Táin* itself he now states his main reservation: certain things (*quibusdam*) in it simply do not merit his credence. At first blush this criticism might seem gratuitous and misguided, as though a tale such as the *Táin* could be subjected to the rigorous criteria of historical writing. Yet from the comments which follow it emerges that the LL-scribe does think of the *Táin* in historical terms, referring to it as *hanc historiam*,<sup>16</sup> though not surprisingly he finds it wanting on this count, 'quibusdam fidem in hac historia aut fabula non accommodo'.

His concerns, and even his terminology, were not new. Centuries earlier, the ecclesiastical historian *par excellence*, the Venerable Bede, in his preface to the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, had addressed the same problem of credence in historiography. In using as a source a Life of St Cuthbert composed by the monks of Lindisfarne, he waived his normal critical procedures for assessing its veracity, 'simpliciter fidem historiae, quam legebam, accommodans',<sup>17</sup> because its monastic origins inspired his confidence.<sup>18</sup> Elsewhere in the *Historia* he prepared his audience for the miracles surrounding the death of St Chad by first establishing the credibility of his main witness, a certain Owine, 'dignus, cui fidem narranti

<sup>15</sup> On the paragraph marker, see S. N. Tranter, 'Marginal Problems', in S. N. Tranter and H. L. C. Tristram (ed.), *Early Irish Literature – Media and Communication* (Tübingen 1989) 221–40, pp. 223–4, 237, and 239, who interprets it as serving 'to distance the scribe's own comment from the tale he has been writing'. This page of the manuscript is reproduced in Best and O'Brien, *The Book of Leinster* II, plate 2, and (in colour) in *Ireland of the Welcomes* vol. 24:6 (Nov./Dec. 1975) 30.

<sup>16</sup> The meaning of this term is discussed below.

<sup>17</sup> 'Accepting the story I read in simple faith'. B. Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (ed.), *Bede's ecclesiastical history of the English people* (Oxford 1969) 6–7.

<sup>18</sup> That he had a high regard both for the Life and for the learning of the community which produced it is indicated by his heavy dependence on it in writing his own Prose Life of Cuthbert and by his submission of the latter to the Lindisfarne community for approval. See B. Colgrave (ed.), *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert* (Cambridge 1940) 14 and 144–5. For valuable comments on Bede's view of *historia*, see R. Ray, "Bede's Vera Lex Historiae", *Speculum* 55 (1980) 1–21, esp. p. 12. (I owe this reference to Dr David Dumville.)

audientes accommodarent'.<sup>19</sup> Likewise his Irish contemporary Adomnán, Abbot of Iona (679–704), in the opening sentence of his *Vita Columbae*, recognized the need to gain the credence of his readers before he launched into an account of Colum Cille's miracles, 'in primis eandem lecturos quosque ammonere procurabo ut fidem dictis adhibeant conpertis'.<sup>20</sup> Given the caution of these monastic historians about accepting relatively recent, edifying, stories as *historia*, it is hardly surprising that the LL-scribe should conclude that the alleged marvels of the *Táin*, uncertain as to origins and witnesses, lacked credibility as *historia*.

He proceeds to elaborate. First, he condemns certain episodes in the *Táin* as *praestrigia demonum*.<sup>21</sup> Well attested in Classical Latin with the meaning 'illusion, trick, sleight (of hand)', *praest(r)igium* in later Latin assumes a Christian meaning, often denoting the deceptions practiced by Satan or demons to mislead mankind.<sup>22</sup> Usually the deception is mental, but in at least one instance *praest(r)igium* denotes visual deception. The pseudo-Augustine (Ambrosiaster?) biblical commentary *Quaestiones veteris et novi testamenti cxxvii*, which was well-known in Ireland,<sup>23</sup> characterizes the vision of Samuel conjured up by the witch of Endor to deceive Saul as a *praestigium satanae*.<sup>24</sup> A cleric educated in such exegesis would surely notice the parallel between this famous biblical scene and episodes in the *Táin* where the demoness Morrígu changes into an old woman<sup>25</sup> or into animal form<sup>26</sup> to confuse Cú Chulainn. And having made the comparison he would naturally apply the terminology of one to the other.

Other parts of the *Táin* he labels as *figmenta poetica*, a derogatory term used by ecclesiastical writers to describe the lurid and incredible stories of Classical mythology.<sup>27</sup> For example, Augustine in *De Civitate Dei* refers disparagingly to legends such as Jupiter's appearing in a shower of gold to impregnate Danae as *figmenta poetarum*,<sup>28</sup> fantasies so preposterous and morally objectionable as to have no redeeming value even as parable or allegory. Judged by such austere criteria,

<sup>19</sup> 'Worthy too of being believed by such as heard his story'. Colgrave and Mynors, *Bede's ecclesiastical history*, 338–9.

<sup>20</sup> 'First, I am minded to warn all who read it that they should put their faith in accounts which are attested'. A. O. and M. O. Anderson (ed.), *Adomnán's Life of Columba* (London 1961) 178–9; trans. R. Sharpe, *Adomnán of Iona: Life of St Columba* (St Ives 1995) 103. The phrase 'fidem adhibere' was probably borrowed from Sulpicius Severus; see further Jean-Michel Picard, 'Bede, Adomnan, and the writing of history', *Peritia* 3 (1984) 50–70, p. 55, n.3.

<sup>21</sup> Best and O'Brien, *The Book of Leinster* II, 399, line 12.418, mark *praestrigia* as a scribal error (presumably for *praestigia*); however, it was a widely used spelling (e.g. in Muirchú's Life of Patrick), no doubt because of its perceived derivation from *praestringere*. Cf. Isidore, *Etymologiae* VIII, viii, 33, 'Dictum praestigium, quod praestringat aciem oculorum'.

<sup>22</sup> See A. Blaise, *Dictionnaire Latin-Français des auteurs Chrétiens* (Strasbourg 1954) 655, s.v. *praestigium*.

<sup>23</sup> It is cited as early as 632 by Cummián; see M. Walsh and D. Ó Cróinín (ed.), *Cummián's Letter De Controversia Paschali and the De Ratione Computandi* (Toronto 1988) 60, note on line 36.

<sup>24</sup> Edited by A. Souter in *Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum latinorum* 50 (Leipzig 1908) 54, line 12.

<sup>25</sup> O'Rahilly, *Táin*, 57, lines 2103–13.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 54, lines 1989 ff.

<sup>27</sup> Though the expression was a commonplace from Plato's time; see P. Riché, *Education and culture in the Barbarian West, sixth through eighth Centuries*, tr. from 3rd French edn by John J. Contreni (Columbia SC. 1976) 82 and n.18.

<sup>28</sup> B. Dombart and A. Kalb (ed.), Bk. II, 8; *CCSL* 47 (Turnhout 1955) 40–1.

numerous incidents in the *Táin* could be described as *figmenta poetica*, for example, Cú Chulainn's *riastartha*,<sup>29</sup> Lóg's spell of invisibility,<sup>30</sup> and the exploits of the Donn Cúailnge which end the story.<sup>31</sup>

Yet ultimately the LL-scribe's judgement of the *Táin* is based not on ecclesiastical but rhetorical criteria. That such criteria were on his mind is hinted at in the final phrase of the colophon, *ad delectationem (stultorum)*, which recalls one of rhetoric's declared objectives, to delight the listener. But they are clearly revealed in the rhetorical terminology which he uses to characterize certain other incidents in the *Táin* as *similia/non similia uero*; and when he debates whether to categorize the work as *historia* or *fabula*. All of these terms belong to the vocabulary of rhetoric, and as such deserve more precise translations than 'story' and 'fable'.

The rhetorical handbooks of the medieval schools, of which the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* is probably the best-known representative, recognized three types of narration, *fabula*, *historia* and *argumentum*.<sup>32</sup> *Fabula* it defined as narrative which 'neque veras neque veri similes continet res'; *historia* as 'gesta res, sed ab aetatis nostrae memoria remota'. Thus, *historia* is a factual narrative of events that actually happened in the distant past; by contrast, *fabula* relates things that are neither true nor even plausible.<sup>33</sup> And while *fabula* might have its uses in the rhetorical schools as a form of *praexercitamentum*, or as a *jeu d'esprit*, in the more sober and austere milieu of the monastic school it denoted a worthless story made up of fantastic, improbable and often unedifying events. For example, in his Old English translation of Boethius's *De consolazione philosophiae*, King Alfred renders *fabula* (referring to the Gigantomachia) by *leas spell*, 'an idle, false tale'.<sup>34</sup> Throughout the Middle Ages among both ecclesiastical and secular literati, *historia* was regarded as the narrative *par excellence*. And for the monastic *litteratus* it found literary expression in the genres of ecclesiastical history, chronicles, and even saints' lives.

Indeed, it was precisely the failure to honour the rhetorical distinction between *historia* and *fabula* which offended another reader of Irish literature, a contemporary foreign scribe (probably English) who copied the *Navigatio Brendani*.<sup>35</sup> No doubt he had expected a historical narrative of the saint's life; instead he found an unedifying fable of Otherworld adventures. He registered his disapproval in the same rhetorical terms used by the LL-scribe, 'Fabulosum est, non uerum, neque

<sup>29</sup> O'Rahilly, *Táin*, 61, lines 2262 ff.; 92, lines 3317 ff. The Lebor na hUidre scribe of the *Táin* reacted to these episodes with the exclamation 'O Emmanuel'. See C. Plummer, 'On the Colophons and Marginalia of Irish Scribes', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 12 (1926), 11–44, pp. 31–2.

<sup>30</sup> O'Rahilly, *Táin*, 60–1, lines 2224–9.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 134–6, lines 4854 ff.

<sup>32</sup> H. Caplan (ed.), [Cicero] *ad C. Herennium: De Ratione Dicendi* (Cambridge Mass. 1964) I, viii, 22–4. See also Cicero, *De Inventione*, I, 27; Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria* II, 4, 2; C. Hahn (ed.), *Rhetores Latini Minores* (Leipzig 1863) 202 (lines 18–20, 33–5), 206 (13–14), 486, 551 (lines 1–2); and Isidore, *Etymologiae* I, xl.

<sup>33</sup> It is not necessary to discuss *argumentum* here.

<sup>34</sup> W. J. Sedgefield (ed.), *King Alfred's Old English version of Boethius De Consolacione Philosophiae* (Oxford [1899] repr. Darmstadt 1968) 98, line 27.

<sup>35</sup> For bibliography, see J. F. Kenney, *Sources for the Early History of Ireland: ecclesiastical* (New York [1927] repr. with corrections by L. Bieler, 1966), no. 204. The manuscript is a composite of the eleventh and twelfth centuries; see H. O. Coxe, *Catalogue of the manuscripts in the Oxford Colleges* by H. O. Coxe (Oxford [1852] repr. with foreword by K. W. Humphreys (Oxford 1972) vol. I, 26–7.

ueri simile. . . has fabellas decet igni tradere'.<sup>36</sup> Yet another contemporary, the English historian, William of Newburgh (1136–98), in the same critical spirit, ridiculed Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*, characterizing its 'Celtic' matter as 'fabulas. . . ex priscis Britonum figmentis sumptas per divinationum praestigias'.<sup>37</sup> These two English critics reveal the same terminology and critical attitudes as the LL-scribe.<sup>38</sup>

However, the reaction of the LL-scribe to the *Táin* was bound to be more complex. For one thing he had considerable respect for native Irish learning, as indicated by his scribal activity in the Book of Leinster which went far beyond mere copying to include compiling a text of the *Dindsenchas*, interpolating passages in an existing text of the *Lebor Gabála*, and expanding the genealogies.<sup>39</sup> Such a person would hardly dismiss out of hand the preeminent tale of his native literature. Furthermore, he would have realized that the basic narrative framework of the *Táin*, its depiction of a state of war between the Ulaid people and the rest of Ireland, could be considered *historia*, an account of deeds actually performed in the remote past. This view of the *Táin* would surely have been reinforced by its generic similarities to another work in the Book of Leinster copied by him, the *Togail Troí*,<sup>40</sup> which in its Latin form was regarded by medieval literati as a *historia* of the war between Greece and Troy.<sup>41</sup> Indeed, another Irishman of the twelfth century had composed a poem on these very similarities, *Clanna ollaman uaisle Emna*, the first six stanzas of which compare Emain Macha with Troy.<sup>42</sup> Most importantly, the LL-scribe would have found solid support for treating the *Táin* as *historia* in the Irish Annals (monastic to the end of the twelfth century), which incorporate references to its events and personages.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>36</sup> '[This work] is fabulous; it is not true, nor [even] probable. . . these fabulous tales ought to be consigned to the fire'. C. Plummer (ed.), *Vitae sanctorum Hiberniae* (Oxford [1910] repr. Dublin 1996) II, 293–4, lines 22 and 50. Cf. also William of Malmesbury's description of Dunstan's education at Glastonbury under Irish teachers, 'Poetarum siquidem scripta dumtaxat quae fabulis strepunt, et artes quae citra utilitatem animae armant eloquium transeunter audivit', (W. Stubbs [ed.], *Vita Sancti Dunstani in Memorials of St. Dunstan*, Rolls Series vol. 63 [London 1874] 257).

<sup>37</sup> 'Fables from ancient fictions of the Britons acquired by means of the illusions of diviners'. *Historia Rerum Anglicarum (1066–1197)*, Rolls Series 82 (London 1884), vol. I, 11–13.

<sup>38</sup> The same concern about distinguishing between *historia* and *fabula* is still evident more than two centuries later in Renaissance Italy. Writing to Boccaccio about the improbable story of Griselda in the *Decameron*, Petrarch refers to it as 'this *historia*, or *fabula* as I prefer to call it'. See James H. Robinson and H. W. Rolfe (transl.), *Petrarch: the first modern scholar and man of letters* (New York 1914), 196.

<sup>39</sup> I follow O'Sullivan, 'Notes', 9–10, and 22, in his identification and analysis of the activities of this scribe (whom he refers to as 'T'). The opposing theory of Best, *The Book of Leinster* I, pp. xv–vii, that all the manuscript was written by one scribe, Aed mac meic Crimthainn, does not prejudice the present argument. See further T. Ó Concheanainn, 'LL and the Date of the Reviser of LU', *Éigse* 20 (1984) 212–25, especially pp. 212–3.

<sup>40</sup> O'Sullivan, 'Notes', 10, suggests that the LL-scribe copied this work before the *Táin*.

<sup>41</sup> Significantly, the author of *Togail Troí* attempts to synchronize its main events with those of world history. See Best and O'Brien, *The Book of Leinster* IV (1965) 1081, lines 31503–13.

<sup>42</sup> As noted by R. Ó hUiginn, 'The Background and Development of *Táin Bó Cúailnge*', in J. P. Mallory *et al.*, *Aspects of the Táin* (Belfast 1992), 29–67, pp. 37–8.

<sup>43</sup> See J. V. Kelleher, 'The Táin and the Annals', *Ériu* 22 (1971) 107–27, p. 109, 'The annals. . . have quite a lot to say about the Ulster Saga and the Táin'; see also Thurneysen, *Heldensage*, 95.

On the other hand, much of the detail within the narrative framework of the *Táin* would inevitably strike someone trained in rhetoric and ecclesiastical historiography as not only untrue, but even beyond the realm of probability (*neque ueri similes*). Hence the LL-scribe's vacillation (twice stated) between the terms *historia* and *fabula* to characterize the *Táin*, though on balance he favours treating it as *fabula*.

It would be interesting to know more about this critic of the *Táin*. His scribal activity in the Book of Leinster has been detailed by Mr. W. O'Sullivan,<sup>44</sup> who argues that in addition to copying such core texts as the *Táin*, *Togail Troí*, and the *Osraige* genealogies, he filled blanks and provided bridge passages throughout; in effect he should be regarded as 'the real author of the Book of Leinster as we know it'. This organizational role and his rather clumsy, hurried writing, suggestive of a scholar rather than a professional scribe, would indicate that he was *magister* of a *scriptorium* or *fer léigind* of a monastic school. He may have been making entries into the manuscript as late as 1186x89, possibly even up to 1201.<sup>45</sup> But more significant (if less compelling) than his identity or precise date is his willingness to subject the *Táin* to the rigorous criteria of Christian Latin historiography and rhetoric. That, and his reaction to the pieties of the Irish colophon, betrays a new, critical, attitude towards native Irish literature, one which presages the end of the compact between the two learned classes of native *filid* and monastic *literati*.<sup>46</sup> The explanation for this change almost certainly is to be sought in the ecclesiastical reforms, especially the introduction of foreign religious orders, which were being effected in the Irish Church during the second half of the twelfth century.<sup>47</sup>

PÁDRAIG Ó NÉILL

*University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill*

<sup>44</sup> See n.39.

<sup>45</sup> O'Sullivan, 'Notes', 27–8.

<sup>46</sup> On the close relations between the two, see P. Mac Cana, 'The Rise of the Later Schools of *Filidheacht*', *Ériu* 25 (1974) 126–46, p. 138. For other evidence that the compact was under attack, see D. Ó Corrain, 'Legend as Critic', in T. Dunne (ed.), *The writer as witness* (Cork 1987), 23–38, pp. 36–7.

<sup>47</sup> It may be significant that the Book of Leinster, although essentially traditional in its Irish minuscule script and illumination, bears some evidence of foreign influence in both punctuation marks and decorative motifs. See, respectively, R. I. Best and H. J. Lawlor (ed.), *The Martyrology of Tallaght*, The Henry Bradshaw Society no. 68 (London 1931) xv; and F. Henry and G. L. Marsh-Micheli, 'A Century of Irish Illumination (1070–1170)', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 62 C (1962) 101–64, pp. 161.