

## EDITING *FLED BRICRENN*

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This paper is a combination of some scholarship, some reminiscence, and some report.

In 1970 I was working on a doctoral dissertation called *Evidence for Oral Composition in Early Irish Saga*. I had decided to focus the study around *Fled Bricrenn*, “Bricriu’s Feast.” It had seemed to me, and still does seem to me, that *Fled Bricrenn* displayed in the fullest measure characteristics of oral compositional style. It had formulaic verse, a paratactic structure, traditional themes in the Parry-Lord sense, and many other features that Axel Olrik had detailed in his “Epic Laws of Folk Narrative.” I thought I could make a pretty good case that *Fled Bricrenn* reflected in a direct way medieval Irish storytelling that could not easily be explained as literary work in the strict sense.

As a graduate student I had received two essential pieces of good advice, one of which was “Evaluate the Text.” So I felt that before writing up various stylistic observations on *Fled Bricrenn* I should do just that. The saga had been edited twice: by Ernst Windisch in *Irische Texte* in 1880 and by George Henderson for the Irish Texts Society in 1899. Only Henderson had considered all of the manuscripts. *Fled Bricrenn* occurs in whole or part in five manuscripts: *Lebor na hUidre*, The Book of the Dun Cow, a basically 12<sup>th</sup> century manuscript I will henceforth refer to as LU; British Library MS Egerton 93, Trinity College MS H.3.17, the Leiden Codex Vossianus, and Edinburgh Gaelic MS 40. The latter is a 16<sup>th</sup> century manuscript which contains only the final

episode, the Champion's Bargain, as if it were a story complete in itself, which it may well have been at some point. The other manuscripts, late 15<sup>th</sup> or early 16<sup>th</sup> century compilations, are variously defective. More on that later. Windisch and Henderson had based their editions on LU, and it is the LU text that essentially everyone knows. It was the LU text I set out to evaluate.

Table I lists the episodes of the saga as found in LU.

#### TABLE I

##### The Episodes of *Fled Bricrenn* following *Lebor na hUidre*

1–28	The dissensions and contests in Bricriu's hall.
28	The catalogue of women (in LU only).
29–32	A <i>rosc</i> by Emer; how Cú Chulainn obtained his horses.
33–41	The encounter with the giant in the mist.
42–56	The procession to Cruachan and arrival there.
57	The attack of the Cruachan cats (in LU only).
58–62	Medb decides the hero's portion and awards the cups to the heroes.
63–65	Further tests at Cruachan.
66–71	Ercol, Samera, the witches and return to Emain Macha.
72–74	The heroes display their cup-tokens.
75–78	Budi, Uath and return to Emain Macha.
79–90	The adventures at Cú Roi's house and return to Emain.
91–102	The Champion's Bargain.

The numbers refer to the paragraphs consistently numbered in the two editions. A variety of things bothered me about the LU text. If it was a shining example of Irish storytelling, it suffered from some strange infelicities. The Ercol-Samera episode seems entirely gratuitous and lacking any motivation. If Medb had passed judgment in paragraph 62, there seems to be no immediate reason why the heroes should seek judgment elsewhere until Medb's deception had been revealed in paragraphs 72-74. Another inconsistency is the Budi mac Báin and Uath episode, paragraphs 75-78, which introduces a beheading test and rather undermines the concluding beheading test. Still

another problem is the giant in the mist episode, paragraphs 33-41, which interrupts the procession to Cruachan. These elements are disconcerting in that they suggest a narrative incompetence we certainly do not associate with Irish oral narrators collected in the past century. Of course, different early Irish narrative texts reveal all sorts of alarming disjunctions that we have come to live with, but I thought LU deserved another look. This was particularly necessary because the texts in the other manuscripts had a different order and lacked those elements that did not make narrative sense. In fact, they seemed to reflect a better narrative structure.

I had two advantages which were unavailable to Windisch and Henderson. In 1912 Richard Best had identified the separate hands in LU, and I had the edition of Best and Bergin to work with which made the hands explicit. Nevertheless, I obtained a microfilm of the manuscript from the Royal Irish Academy. Even more important, I had the extended piece by the Dutch Celticist H.P.A. Oskamp who had thoroughly examined the manuscript when it had been rebound in the sixties and had published his results in the *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*. I knew, therefore, that *Fled Bricrenn* in LU was the result of two hands, Mael Muire or M and a later interpolator whom we have come to call H. But I learned from Professor Oskamp that H had intercalated two leaves into *Fled Bricrenn* and had erased portions of M's text, presumably to insert some of his own material. By comparing the number of characters M and H respectively could fit onto a column—a tedious process which had me down on my living room floor with mock-ups of the manuscript pages and little squares of paper—I came to the following conclusions: H interpolated the Budi-Uath beheading test into the manuscript. It exists in none of the other manuscripts. In order to accomplish this at the point toward the end

of the story, he needed to introduce a new leaf and to rearrange the incidents, providing appropriate transitions. He also possibly interpolated Emer's *rosc* and the story of how Cú Chulainn obtained his horses, missing as well in the other manuscripts although, to be honest, I am not so completely sure it wasn't in M's version. In any case, he needed to erase portions of M's work, including the *rosc* if it was there, and rewrite it. In particular, he had to move the giant in the mist episode from its rightful place—an encounter on the way to Cú Roí's house—and place it where it does not properly fit on the way to Cruachan. Here is where H ran into some trouble because the interpolated leaf at this point hadn't enough space to contain M's version, the *rosc* and the giant without some abridgment. On the whole, H tried to preserve M's language and when he erased, he recopied M as far as possible. But the evidence of the other manuscripts provides a description of the giant twice as long as we find in LU. Indeed, the formulaic descriptive passage could not fit onto H's interpolated leaf, so he abridged it. And thus it is fair to say that the order of incidents of M's *Fled Bricrenn* before H's work resembled the story as we find it in the Egerton manuscript, the Trinity College manuscript and the Leiden codex. The only significant differences among the texts are 1. the Cruachan cat episode found only in M; 2. the Budi-Uath episode, H's work entirely; 3. Emer's *rosc* and Cú Chulainn's horses which may or may not have been part of M's text; 4. the length of the description of the giant in the mist. So a reconstructed order of the incidents of *Fled Bricrenn* should look like Table 2 with the episodes in brackets representing H's additional material.

## TABLE 2

### A Reconstructed Order: M's text

#### *Paragraphs*

- 1—28 The dissensions and contests in Bricriu's hall.  
28 The catalogue of women.  
[29—32 *A rosc by Emer; how Cú Chulainn obtained his horses.*]  
42—56 The procession to Cruachan and arrival there.  
57 The attack of the Cruachan cats.  
63—65 Further tests at Cruachan.  
58—62 Medb decides the hero's portion and awards the cups to the heroes.  
66—71 Ercol, Samera, the witches and return to Emain Macha.  
72-74 The heroes display their cup-tokens.  
[75-78 *Budi, Uath and return to Emain Macha.*]  
33-41 The encounter with the giant in the mist.  
79-90 The adventures at Cú Roi's house and return to Emain.  
91-102 The Champion's Bargain.

Whether or not the additional material represented narrative from some alternative version of *Fled Bricrenn* unattested elsewhere is an open question. At least I left it at that.

The resulting shape of *Fled Bricrenn* now looked like a much more coherent narrative. And in 1976 or 1977 I lifted out this part of my dissertation, rewrote it a bit, and sent it off for publication to *Ériu* where it was published in 1978. If you want to read the details and the evidence for what I have just summarized, you can look it up in volume 29. The editors of *Ériu* were David Greene and Proinsias Mac Cana.

Now it is one of my weaknesses as a scholar, I suppose, or maybe it is a strength, that I usually do not know what is going on. Yesterday I learned for the first time that David Dumville had moved to Aberdeen, that there is no more independent School of Scottish Studies, and that Helen Fulton had moved to Swansea. I did not know when I

sent the article off that Proinsias Mac Cana intended to edit *Fled Bricrenn*. I had written toward the end of the essay, "Future editors of *Fled Bricrenn* will have to realize that the text of LU is not sacrosanct, even if it is the earliest manuscript." I had other good advice for editors based on my sense that the saga was the product of oral composition. I may not have been so free with my advice had I known that the editor I was sending the piece to was planning on being such an editor.

I had met Proinsias Mac Cana first in 1969 at the Dublin Institute Summer School where I met Fergus Kelly as well. Proinsias was teaching a Welsh course, but practically my every waking moment was spent coping with Daniel Binchy's Advanced Old Irish course which Fergus might have felt was easy enough but for me at the time was pushing at the limits of what I knew. It was a course that gave a whole new meaning to the phrase "shame culture." So I did not get to know Professor Mac Cana very well then. I ran into him in 1975 at a meeting of the American Committee for Irish Studies in Virginia and we had a drink together. He was always a very approachable person, easy to talk with. I do not think I saw him again until the International Celtic Congress in Galway in 1979. By then I had published my article. He drew me aside at one point—I think we had pints—and asked if I was intending to edit *Fled Bricrenn*. It actually had never crossed my mind, and I told him so. My interest had been entirely in establishing a sense of text that revealed Irish narrative at its best, that is a coherent story with a beginning, middle and end which I felt the saga demonstrated. Whereupon he astonished me by asking me to be co-editor of the text with him. I was genuinely flabbergasted by this offer since I felt my skills and expertise, such as they were, did not lend themselves to editing medieval Irish

texts. I told him he had a clear field and that I did not think I had the paleographic experience to be a co-editor. We left it at that.

In 1980 Jo Radner had organized a section at the MLA conference to be held in Houston, Texas. Proinsias was to be the primary speaker, and I was to be a respondent to his paper. I think there were to be other respondents too. Since Proinsias was to be in the States for a while and since at the time I controlled a University speaker's fund, I wrote to Proinsias and invited him to give a talk in Cincinnati in January, an offer he accepted. However, a few days before the MLA meeting I became ill and couldn't go. I had written out my comments and sent them off to Jo, missing completely what I later learned was a perfectly dreadful conference. I was still recovering when Proinsias arrived two weeks later. His talk went very well. I was able to wine and dine him. I asked him what he thought of my comments that Jo had read and he confessed he had been so jet lagged that he fell asleep and didn't hear a word. He may have been being politic, but one had the feeling that Proinsias didn't really tell outright lies. In any case, as I was driving him to the airport for his next stop on his tour, he asked me again if I would edit *Fled Bricrenn* with him. In retrospect I can see that I was weakened by disease and perhaps vanity. In any case, I felt I had to accept at that point and I did. My primary task was to establish a text. His primary task was to write the linguistic notes. Both of us would contribute to the other.

There were immediate difficulties. I was in Cincinnati. Proinsias was in Dublin. The manuscripts were all over the place. I was not an independently wealthy scholar. I had not prospects at "Jeopardy." I ordered a microfilm of the relevant portion of the Egerton manuscript. The microfilm was only partially helpful. Egerton 93 is badly worn

at the edges, and it was simply impossible to recover all of it. I made a trip to London and fared better with the manuscript in hand, but I do not think I did much better than Windisch. Nor was it entirely necessary, I think, to account for every word in Egerton which is missing the first twelve sections of the story and breaks off at pretty much the same point as LU. I should make it clear that Mael Muire's LU, Egerton, Trinity, Leiden and Edinburgh where they have the same episodes in common share the same wording with the exception of different transitions to following sections and the description of the giant in the mist. None of them are copies of the others but they share the same exemplar—except for H's work in LU. So it was going to be unlikely that reading every single word in Egerton would improve the edition except perhaps for the giant in the mist episode. In any case, I did the best I could. LU as a text was pretty well a known quantity. But since it was going to be a copy text in most instances, I reread it. Nothing startling emerged from this effort. I sent the results so far to Proinsias.

In 1989-90 I managed by selling my body and soul to administrative work to get a year long sabbatical the primary purpose of which was to work on *Fled Bricrenn*. I had some secondary purposes too and spent the first six months in Edinburgh as a guest of the Celtic Department there. Paradoxically, Proinsias was during this time teaching at Harvard so there was no particular point in rushing off to Dublin. I then encountered the Edinburgh manuscript face to face. And I was extremely lucky because working with the Gaelic manuscripts in the National Library when I turned up was Ronald Black, a scholar whose experience in these matters far exceeded my own. Edinburgh Gaelic Manuscript 40 is a truly hateful piece of work, made more so by the fact that it alone seemed to contain the conclusion of *Fled Bricrenn*. The scribe could not have understood much of



what he was copying. It is filled with outlandish forms, some of which are complete gibberish. It also had some lacunae and blurred words. Dr. Black and I spent some time with ultraviolet light to bring out what could not be read otherwise, and I did read a few more words than Kuno Meyer had been able to do in his original transcription of the text published in *Revue Celtique* 14. But there are roughly three words hopelessly lost and I eventually had to give up on them. What emerged then was something not much different from Meyer's original work. (I should point out that although I will refer to the manuscript as "Edinburgh," it was produced in the Irish midlands, and the Scots bear no responsibility for it other than its preservation.)

On February 1, St. Brigit's Day, I arrived in Ireland, and after getting settled in, turned up at the Institute. From then on to June a routine was established. In the mornings I would read the Trinity and Leiden manuscripts in what I considered to be doable chunks. I then compiled a page for each clause with the readings from the four manuscripts, and suggest a text to adopt. I say "clause" since the paratactic nature of *Fled Bricrenn* makes it difficult to say in some cases where a sentence ends. There are editorial judgments to be made in these cases, part of what we discussed. In any case, I would then print out two copies and after lunch I would meet with Proinsias. We would go over my morning's work. When there was any doubt, we checked my readings against previous ones. Every once in a while I went back to the manuscripts when something did not make sense. Believe it or not, I made mistakes once in a while. And sometimes Proinsias thought I had made a mistake when I hadn't. In fact, I tried very hard when transcribing on a word to word or letter to letter basis not to think too much about meaning since there was always the danger of imposing an interpretation where it

didn't belong. Later, when Proinsias and I sifted through the variants, was when we thought about meaning. Eventually we would end up with a reading that seemed genuine. I would then enter that into a draft edition with the variants.

What I have been describing sounds like a very workmanlike process and it often was. But there were hitches. We would meet in Proinsias's large office where he was generally available to all and sundry: other Institute faculty, visiting friends, and so on. Every so often BBC Wales would call him up for a phone interview. Proinsias was the Irishman to interview about matters Irish for Wales since his Welsh was fluent. Once in a while Proinsias would take me off for a pub lunch. This would consist of a heavy meal along with a pint, followed by a glass of Black Bush. Whereupon Proinsias would start off for a five mile postprandial hike, and I would stagger back to my office and sink into somnolence. Not much got done those afternoons. The truth was that Proinsias was filled with enormous energy, mental energy of course, but also physical energy. In his college days at Queens he had been a very successful amateur boxer which explained his ears. At the age of sixty-four he still jumped rope in the manner of boxers every day—very impressive to see. Visiting him and Réiltín in their Donegal summer home on the Bloody Foreland, I was challenged in the nicest way to climb to the top for a good view of Tory Island: Proinsias sprinted this. I finally made it up after checking my pulse several time on the way. Physical activity was for Proinsias the same as breathing.

On the other hand, some days were lost to Meniere's disease, an affliction, for those of you who don't know, of the inner ear which unpredictably sets off an intense bout of vertigo. My mother suffers from Meniere's disease so I was very sympathetic to Proinsias's condition. It was particularly aggravating because Proinsias was a very

gregarious, social person, but large noisy crowds tended to trigger an attack. So did sudden shifts in the weather or, I suspect, barometric pressure. He told me he had once been crossing Cambridge Common when an attack struck, and all he could do was lie on the ground helplessly while passers-by tried to help. But there wasn't any way to help but just let the attack pass. There were days when we were working when he had attacks or had them the night before, and they left him woozy and not up to much effort. These attacks got worse as he aged.

Other impediments: Proinsias was very active in the Royal Irish Academy. He was a consultant on a wide range of projects. He was an editor of *Ériu*, of course. But his pet project was the restoration of the Collège d'Irlandais in Paris. The success of this effort was only realized after many years of negotiation, acting as a go-between the officials in Ireland and the bureaucracy in France, both secular and Church. If you have ever had dealings with French bureaucracy, then you will appreciate the heroic nature of the undertaking. But the truth of it is that Proinsias really enjoyed it. He loved Paris. He liked speaking French. He had a pied à terre at the College and knew the best bistros in the vicinity. (Parenthetically I might add that I took him to a *moules* bistro which he could never find again even though I gave him directions which he asked for every time I saw him.)

One key to Proinsias's character that I gradually came to realize was grounded in his origins. Most of us here who knew him knew him as an internationally recognized scholar, president of the Royal Irish Academy, a Professor at UCD, at Harvard, at the Institute. He was well known in a number of different countries, and one of his chief characteristics as a scholar was his kindness, availability and general helpfulness to

foreign scholars and students. He was a great enabler. But there was also Frankie McCann, a Belfast Catholic boy whose teen years were spent during the Second World War in a major military staging area, a period of some privation. He had stories of being scared in Belfast when mistakenly walking into the wrong Orange areas. He claimed, and I believed him eventually, that if he saw a group of strangers sitting around in a room in the Six Counties, he could tell just by looking at them who was Catholic and who was Protestant. He confessed to me one day when we were driving around Donegal that he had a special, secret fondness for cowboy movies—not the adult Western sort but the Ken Maynard, Hopalong Cassidy, Hoot Gibson sort of films where the villains wore black hats and the heroes rode white horses. And I could see that growing up in Belfast in wartime meant that the escape offered by these American movies where the good guys always won was a special time for many, and for many treasured throughout their lives. Anyway, it was this Francis McCann, cowboy enthusiast, footballer and boxer, who went to Queens, then to Aberystwyth and eventually to Dublin, becoming along the way Proinsias Mac Cana. But the Frankie McCann was always there, which was a good thing, I think. Proinsias enjoyed the status he had earned without it ever going to his head or without his considering the background of anyone.

Amusingly, it was well into this 1990 Winter and Spring, Proinsias and I having known each other for well over ten years, that some remark I offered made him realize that I was Jewish. A few days earlier he and Réiltín had had Valerie and me to dinner, and Réiltín had served a delicious pork roast. He was full of apologies, and it took me some time to convince him that I didn't keep kosher and that the pork roast was fine. I was particularly amused because for a few weeks after realizing I was Jewish, his

conversation ran to Jewish colleagues he had known and I had suddenly become somewhat more exotic than he had hitherto envisioned me. But since I didn't suddenly sprout yarmulkes and phylacteries, our relationship settled down into routine soon enough. And the fact is that both professionally and socially it really made no difference of course, and that is true for all of my Irish colleagues—as far as I know.

One down side to having been Frankie McCann and coming to Dublin by way of Wales was, I believe, that some considered Proinsias an outsider, a very successful outsider. This, I think, led in part to the somewhat ferocious treatment he received from some younger scholars during this time. To my knowledge Proinsias never did anything by word or deed to any of them, but the hostility was for a while rampant. One day I happened to wander into his office when he was out and thinking that his computer screen was showing some *Fled Bricrenn* stuff, I went over to look. Instead it was a letter of recommendation for one of his more hostile detractors and it was a glowing one reflecting the individual's excellent work. Proinsias was really a big person beyond his scholarship, and anything I might say about him today should be put in the context that he was a good person, much more important than being a good scholar.

Finally, another impediment to our work was the fault of us both. We both enjoyed discussions of a wider range of topics than Celtic philology. With some shame I must confess that some afternoons were spent discussing French or Russian literature or Irish politics or more recent Irish history. Proinsias was a fluent and voluble talker. He was also a pretty good listener. Engaged on a subject I care about, opera say, I can be really boring and dogmatic. Opera was not one of Proinsias's interests, but he was interested in my interest and so an afternoon could go by. We had different tastes in

fiction which led to discussions of some length. He admired the realistic novel. I like all kinds of novels but at the time was reading Georges Perec, and OULIPO was a movement like surrealism that left Proinsias cold. Much was happening in Northern Ireland, and I was fascinated by his take on the events unfolding. But the worst thing which enveloped both of our interest was the World Cup. Ireland was in the World Cup, and evenings were spent watching the matches, all the matches. The next day was often initiated by an hour long kick by kick discussion of the previous day's match. As Ireland rather unbelievably progressed through the tournament, interest and ensuing analysis became more and more lengthy. Then the day came that Ireland beat Romania to get to the Quarter Finals, a tremendous upset that no one living on that island will easily forget. If ever there was a demonstration of what the anthropologist Victor Turner called *comunitas*, this was it. My wife and I celebrated at The Goat along with about two thousand other people. The next day she bought herself a tee shirt with a picture of the Irish national team on it, and this is someone who doesn't know who Barry Bonds is. Did anyone at the Institute talk about anything else the next day? Fergus may know. But Proinsias and I didn't.

I would not like you to think that we were not discussing *Fled Bricrenn* not only on the micro level but at the macro level as well. Some sense of that is conveyed in Proinsias's contribution to the Irish Text Society symposium on the text. He alludes there to my sense of the general sense of the story as representing a kind of mirror for warriors: the only proper way to distinguish greatness in warriors is through defense of the tribe and tribal honor. Proinsias bought into this reading. We discussed the question of how

far scribes could be antiquarian. I argued for a wider range of knowledge than Proinsias was willing to grant them, and in the end I acceded to his arguments.

Nevertheless, as June approached we were getting down to the last leaves of the manuscripts, each dropping out of text one by one: first the Trinity College manuscript, then Egerton, then LU. Only the Leiden codex and Edinburgh were left to work with. This situation required more time. When we had LU as a copy text, decisions were relatively straightforward. The question to ask was did the other manuscripts provide any superior readings of a given passage. Except in cases where H had interfered with M's work, they usually didn't. But now we had to make textual decisions based on two eccentric manuscripts. Edinburgh, as I have suggested, was totally unreliable. Leiden was quite reliable in its way but the scribe there had an orthography which I have never seen before or since. It was rather as if the broad to broad, slender to slender rule we associate with Modern Irish had dawned on him and gone to his head. There are vowels all over the place. Under the spelling peculiarities, however, it was clear that the Leiden scribe was faithfully reproducing although not copying a good exemplar.

*Fled Bricrenn* in the Leiden Codex occupies the end of the manuscript. It was transcribed quite accurately by Ludwig Stern in 1903. The last leaf of the manuscript has the beginning of Beheading Test on its inside page, but the outside is or was black. Looking closely at the rather good microfilm in the Institute library, I could discern parts of letters showing through the blackness, suggesting that under the opaque surface might well be the conclusion of the saga. Indeed, the conclusion would just fit onto this last page. I thought this was worth exploring because once Proinsias and I were left with just the Edinburgh text, while this simplified matters in one sense, the result was to leave the

conclusion of *Fled Bricrenn* an ugly one, linguistically and aesthetically speaking. We finished up our work. I left Proinsias with a text to which he was to attach the linguistic notes. I was going to try to get to Leiden and look at the manuscript directly, something which the excellence of the microfilm had seemed unnecessary at first.

I wasn't able to get to Leiden for a year. When I did, I signed in a user's log with very few names on it: Kuno Meyer, Ludwig Stern, Rudolf Thurneysen. I rather enjoyed adding my name after Thurneysen's. Oddly, I don't remember seeing Henderson's name on the list. In any case, the last page was indeed opaque, almost completely black. But I had been right that there were letters vaguely discernable peeking out from the blackness, and it was hard not to think that a better conclusion of *Fled Bricrenn* was lurking under the dirt. At this point I made a mistake. I asked the manuscript librarian at Leiden, a very helpful man, if they could clean the last page. Oh yes, he told me. They had a nun in the country who did that kind of work for them. I should have been suspicious about that nun in the country. But I was still a little jet lagged. I think I muttered something about testing first if the ink was water soluble. But all was smiles and a willingness to help. About six months later I received word that the nun had done her work and the last page was cleaned. They sent me a picture of it. The nun will have to spend some time in Purgatory. The picture I got was blank. She had washed it away or so it seemed.

In 1997-98 I had another sabbatical for which I paid dearly in drudgery, and my hope was to return to Dublin and together with Proinsias to finish the edition. But I stopped first at Leiden to look at the manuscript. The last page now was to the naked eye a pleasant cream color but it was possible to discern indentations that represented, I thought, the mark of the stylus. I tried to see if ultraviolet light would help. The Library



had a nice room for ultraviolet reading. Try as I might, I could make no headway with it although text was discernable. I came to Dublin discouraged but not beaten. I knew that there was technology out there that was employed for text restoration. The FBI, for instance, was supposed to be able to reassemble burnt documents and read them. I wondered how they would feel about using their laboratory to read a 15<sup>th</sup> century Irish manuscript page.

Also discouraging was the fact that Proinsias had not made much headway on the linguistic notes. He was busier than ever in Paris and around Dublin. I drafted part of an introduction. We talked about the form of the edition. Proinsias had in mind something along the lines of Cecile O'Rahilly's *Táin* editions: an Irish text, followed by a translation, followed by notes. I had compiled a vocabulary list, but I had no difficulty with this plan. Proinsias arranged for a colleague in the Netherlands to try to photograph the Leiden page with ultraviolet light. When we eventually received the photographs, we saw they were better than what we had up to that point, there was text there, but it was still unreadable. Proinsias sent the photographs to Charles Wright here to see if his colleague Professor Morand could make anything of them. He couldn't. I have one of the photographs here. If you think you can read it, you too can be an editor of *Fled Bricrenn*. In the meantime, the linguistic notes were not going well, which is to say they were not progressing. There had been in the past computer problems. I had originally used WordStar as a word processor. Proinsias started off with Nota Bene. Both of these were now dinosaurs. Proinsias shifted to Word Perfect while I was using Word. Our initial text was produced with Word Perfect since I judged it was easier for me to switch word processor than for him. But eventually Proinsias switched to Word as well so our

original documents had to be reformatted yet again. This took tedious time. Proinsias would add a bit of linguistic note now and again when I pressed him, but then he was off to Paris. I settled down to other activity, annoying Fergus with my cigarette smoke, overspending on copying, overspending on interlibrary loan materials although I was unaware that there was a cost and was mortified to find out. I had a good year, my family had a good year, but *Fled Bricrenn* did not progress much. From time to time I would try to research text restoration technology since I was stubbornly clinging to reading that last page. The year ended without satisfactory results for the edition.

I am sobered by the fact that the last time I saw Proinsias face to face was right here two years ago—on this floor in this building. I was myself sick then and later had to ask Józsi if my talk had been coherent. I was usually rushing back to my room to rest. So Proinsias and I had no real time for discussion. Of course we corresponded since.

Shortly before the shock of Proinsias's death, I discovered a company in England, Foster and Freeman, that specializes in hardware to read what is known in the field of forensics "questioned documents." They make a Video Spectral Comparator (the FBI swears by it) and an Electro Static Detection Apparatus (ESDA for short) either one of which or both sound as if they could read the Leiden page. I have another sabbatical next academic year, and one of my goals is to try to link up a Comparator or an ESDA with the Leiden page. It may prove to be expensive, I don't yet know. In the meantime, Liam Bretnach has sent me what computer files the Institute had for *Fled Bricrenn*. They are all old ones. I think Réiltín may have others and have written her but haven't yet heard back. I don't know how far Proinsias got. I still have hopes to produce an edition of *Fled Bricrenn* that will carry Proinsias's name.

We didn't finish the edition. I hope I can finish it. It will not be perfect. A lot of the Word Battle of the Women will remain obscure. But it will be better than previous editions.

Personally speaking, though I had moments of frustration, I have no real regrets for signing on the edition. I learned a lot. I made a valued friend. And frankly, the hard work and effort that goes into a scholarly project is never justified for the workers in the result. The pleasure is in the process-- if you can't benefit from the process, you haven't succeeded. So far I have succeeded. But I will admit that the process won't be the same without Proinsias, nor will my sense of Ireland be the same without him.