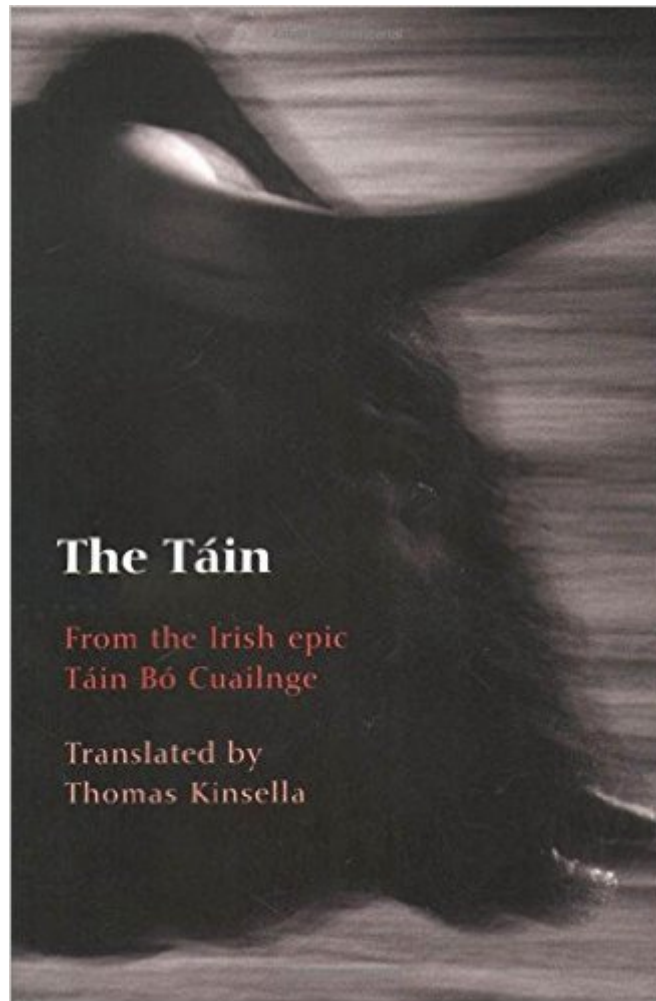


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The Tain: Translated From The Irish Epic Tain Bo Cuailnge



Synopsis

The *Táin Bó Cuailnge*, center-piece of the eighth-century Ulster cycle of heroic tales, is Ireland's greatest epic. Thomas Kinsella's lively translation is based on the partial texts in two medieval manuscripts, with elements from other versions. This edition includes a group of related stories which prepare for the action of the *Táin* along with brush drawings by Louis le Brocquy.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The Ulster Cycle is a group of tales associated with the northeast of Ireland and the *Táin Bó Cuailgne* is the core of the cycle. The tales are preserved in manuscripts of the twelfth-century and later, but they look back to a pre-Christian culture dominated by warriors who counted their wealth in cows. Raiding your neighbors was one way to acquire more cows. In the *Táin Bó Cuailgne*, one group, the Connachta, tries to obtain a very special bull, a transformed human, by raiding another group, the Ulaid. In the process, gods, goddesses, kings, queens, seers, and heroes of every description become involved, and a raid turns into a monumental battle. This is not a retelling or a novelized version of the Ulster cycle tales. Rather this is a translation of an ancient saga equivalent to the *Odyssey*, *Iliad*, or *Mahabharata*. Years ago, not long after this book was first printed, I had the good fortune to hear Thomas Kinsella, an eminent modern Irish poet, describe how in translating the *Táin*, he combined his own vision with expert input from scholars of the ancient language. The voice in this translation is that of Kinsella, but it echoes the voices of all those who came before him. Having studied the ancient language and texts myself, I feel that Kinsella has produced a work of

poetic art that is nevertheless faithful to the meaning and spirit of the stories. The beautiful semi-abstract images by Le Brocquy are not really illustrations but accompanying art, demonstrating how the cycle of Ulster tales, which has inspired Irish artists through various eras, continues to kindle the creative fire in those who read and hear them. If you are interested in learning about pre-Christian Irish--or Celtic--tradition, the Tain is indispensable reading.

A few weeks ago, I compared (on under both versions) the new Oxford UP translation from the Middle Welsh by Sioned Davies of "The Mabinogion" with the standard edition by Patrick Ford, from U. of California Press. The Old Irish equivalent of a medieval Celtic epic that for most of us represents the epitome of ancient adventure and mortal combat, "The Táin," now can gain the same comparison and contrast. We can finally study Thomas Kinsella's 1970 Oxford UP edition next to Ciaran Carson's 2008 Viking-Penguin hardcover. As with my comments on about the two competing Mabinogi, I will select a favorite passage. I will transcribe how Kinsella and Carson render it. Poetic Champions Compose! Kinsella (pp. 250-51): "Then Medb got her gush of blood. 'Fergus,' she said, 'take over the shelter of shields at the rear of the men of Ireland until I relieve myself.' 'By god,' Fergus said, 'you have picked a bad time for this.' 'I can't help it,' Medb said. 'I'll die if I can't do it.' So Fergus took over the shelter of shields at the rear of the men of Ireland and Medb relieved herself. It dug three great channels, each big enough to take a household. The place is called Fual Medba, Medb's Foul Place, ever since. Cúchulainn found her like this, but he held his hand. He wouldn't strike her from behind. 'Spare me,' Medb said. 'If I killed you dead,' Cúchulainn said, 'it would only be right.' But he spared her, not being a killer of women. [Cúchullain watches them depart. The battle is over, the Connacht forces defeated, as Medb tells Fergus. . . .] 'We have had shame and shambles here today, Fergus.' 'We followed the rump of a misguided woman,' Fergus said.

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