



PROJECT MUSE®

---

Le Livre d'Artiste: Louis Brocquy and The Tain (1969)

Ailbhe Ni Bhriain

New Hibernia Review, Volume 5, Number 1, Earrach/Spring 2001, pp. 69-82  
(Article)

Published by Center for Irish Studies at the University of St. Thomas

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/nhr.2001.0014>



➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/23975>



Louis le Brocqy, "Raven (Morrigan)," *The Tain* (1969), full plate, p. [98]. Reproduced by kind permission of the artist.

Ailbhe Ní Bhriain



## *Le Livre d'Artiste*: Louis le Brocquy and *The Tain* (1969)

In September, 1969, Liam Miller published *The Tain*, a translation of the *Táin Bó Cuailnge* by Thomas Kinsella, with ink brush drawings by the Irish painter Louis le Brocquy. This ninth Dolmen Edition is an Irish equivalent of the *livre d'artiste*. The involvement of Kinsella and le Brocquy in the making of *The Tain* shows it to be an undertaking personal to both writer and artist. The formal design elements of the book demonstrate its aesthetic values and parallels it with the *livre d'artiste*. The interplay between Kinsella's text and le Brocquy's images underlines the integral role of the illustrations. In turn, the style and medium of those illustrations reveal a number of influences upon le Brocquy and references to his earlier paintings. Likewise, *The Tain* has influenced le Brocquy's later work, thus establishing this Dolmen commission as central to the artist's career.

Although le Brocquy has thus far illustrated ten books, his experience in graphics is seldom referred to in critical studies of his work. That neglect highlights a lack of appreciation in Ireland for the illustrator's role and for the book as an aesthetic medium. Because the Dolmen Press closed after the death of Liam Miller in 1987, the Dolmen Editions can be found only in specialist bookstores and in such special collections as the National Irish Visual Arts Library, thus limiting the aesthetic study of the Dolmen Editions and of *The Tain* as a *livre d'artiste*.

The *livre d'artiste*, an almost exclusively French art form, was conceived by the art dealer Ambroise Vollard in 1900. Vollard's publication of Paul Verlaine's poems *Parallelement*, illustrated by Pierre Bonnard, remains one of the most successful examples of the union of author and artist.<sup>1</sup> The form stemmed, however, from the strong history of the illustrated book and the artist's "album" in France. In Ireland, however, art itself is seen to "occupy the gate lodge to the literary Big House."<sup>2</sup> The Dolmen Press was unique in its treatment of the book as an equally literary and visual device. Founded by Liam

1. Gordon N. Ray, *The Art of the French Illustrated Book, 1700–1914* (New York: Dover Publications, 1986), p. 498.

2. Brian O'Doherty, quoted in Dorothy Walker, *Louis le Brocquy* (Dublin: Ward River Press, 1981), p. 55.

Miller in 1953, the press was originally a literary forum and employed an elementary hand press and a single Caslon font.<sup>3</sup> But by its third year, Dolmen Press publications began to show Liam Miller's preference for type design, artful margins, and illustrations on a generous page—all distinctive elements of the *livre d'artiste*.

The Irish poet Thomas Kinsella was involved with the Dolmen Press from the start, and his translation of the *Táin Bó Cuailnge*, which had been commissioned by Liam Miller in 1954, was one of the press's principal projects. *The Exile of the Sons Uisliu*, the first part of the *Táin* saga, was published in an edition of twenty-five copies illustrated by Mia Cranwell in November, 1954, fifteen years before *The Tain* was completed.<sup>4</sup>

The *Táin Bó Cuailnge*—*táin*, meaning the gathering of people for a cattle raid—is a prose epic with verse passages and forms the centerpiece of the cycle of Ulster heroic stories. It tells of the exploits of King Conchobar and his chief warrior Cúchulainn (“The Hound of Ulster”) and of the invasion of Ulster by Queen Medb of Connacht in an attempt to capture the Brown Bull of Cuailgne. Dating as far back as the twelfth century in manuscript form, this legend has been treated both academically by scholars and linguists and romantically by such Revival writers as Yeats and Lady Gregory. The Dolmen Edition of the saga was to give, in Kinsella's words, the first “living version of the story,” a version true to its blunt and brutal Gaelic character.<sup>5</sup> Kinsella noted that “[a] strong element in the sagas is their directness in bodily matters: the easy references to seduction, copulation, urination, the picking of vermin, the suggestion of incest. . . .” (*T* 261). In refining this, earlier translations, such as Lady Gregory's *Cuchulain of Muirthemne* (1902), lost something of the essence of the legend.

In Kinsella's *Tain*, the wise warrior Scathach instructs her daughter, on their first meeting with Cúchulainn: “Take him to bed with you tonight and sleep with him, if that is what you want.” To that Uathach replies, “It would be no hardship” (*T* 30). According to Lady Gregory, however, Scathach tamely remarks, “I can see this man has pleased you,” and Uathach nobly admits, “There would be great grief on me indeed if he were not to return alive to his

3. Liam Miller, *Dolmen XXV: An Illustrated Bibliography of the Dolmen Press, 1951–1976*, Dolmen Editions XXV (Dublin: The Dolmen Press, 1976), p. 8.

4. *The Sons of Usnech*, trans. Thomas Kinsella (Dublin: The Dolmen Press, November 1954). This title was reprinted with designs by Bridget Swinton in March, 1960. Miller, 20.

5. *The Tain*, trans. Thomas Kinsella, Dolmen Edition IX (September, 1969), p. vii; hereafter cited parenthetically, thus: (*T* vii). All versions of Kinsella's translation give the title simply as *The Tain*, without the *fada*. The *Táin* with the *fada* refers the Old Irish saga *Táin Bó Cuailnge*.

own people.”<sup>6</sup> Similarly, Gregory’s Deirdre behaves like a damsel in distress in this version, crying “Naoise. . . are you going to leave me?”<sup>7</sup> In contrast, Kinsella’s Derdriu demands, “Are you rejecting me?” before “rushing at him and [catching] the two ears of his head” (*T* 12). Kinsella’s language creates characters stronger than the meek creatures created by Lady Gregory.

Brutality is expressed with honesty in Kinsella’s translation of the *Táin*, a raid started “for the sake of a whore’s backside” (*T* 221). We are told of heads smashed together so that “each was stained grey with the other’s brains” (*T* 249), of “limbs leaping from their sockets” (*T* 83), of eyes burst, livers split, and of the “blood of men in multitudes” (*T* 161). While both Gregory and Kinsella use the *Táin* mythology to represent Ireland, Kinsella belongs to a school of poets who abandoned the romanticism of the “Celtic Twilight,” believing, as Austin Clarke suggests, that “before verse can be human again it must learn to be brutal.”<sup>8</sup>

Le Brocquy’s art cannot be accurately described as “brutal,” yet le Brocquy does echo these ideals in using mythology to escape what he has described as the “picturesque images” and “social irreality” of Irish art.<sup>9</sup> Le Brocquy’s early paintings of Ireland’s itinerant “travellers,” like *Travellers Making a Twig Sign* (1946), are partly influenced by Synge’s descriptions in his prose of the wildness and vitality of the travelling and island communities and resemble studies of a primitive ancestral culture.<sup>10</sup> In his early paintings, this ancestral search can be related to landscapes in *Famine Cottages* (1944).<sup>11</sup> By the early 1960s, the ancestral search had taken the form of depicting the human head in paintings “reconstructing” and “evoking” images of such Irish rebels as Wolfe Tone in *Evoked Head of an Irish Martyr* (1964).<sup>12</sup>

While wholly Irish in content, le Brocquy’s art has always been French in its formality and style. Le Brocquy admired Georges Rouault and Pierre Bonnard, artists responsible for some of the finest *livres d’artiste*, and both were strongly represented in the Irish Exhibition of Living Art set up by le Brocquy in 1946.<sup>13</sup> More importantly, le Brocquy spent extended periods in France and, indeed, he resided there from the 1950s onward. There, in close

6. Lady Gregory, *Cuchulain of Muirthemne: The Story of the Men of the Red Branch of Ulster* (1902; Gerrards Cross: Colin Smyth, 1973), p. 67.

7. Gregory, p. 42.

8. Austin Clarke, *Poetry in Modern Ireland* (Dublin: Cultural Relations Committee, 1952), p. 30.

9. Walker, p. 91.

10. Brenda McPharland et. al., ed., *Louis le Brocquy’s Painting 1936–1996* (Dublin: Irish Museum of Modern Art, 1996), p. 42.

11. Walker, p. 73.

12. McPharland, p. 96.

13. McPharland, p. 28.

contact with Henri Matisse and Alberto Giacometti, he absorbed the tradition of the *livre d'artiste* and the painter-illustrator.

By 1967, the year in which Liam Miller commissioned drawings for *The Tain*, le Brocquy had already illustrated two books: Austin Clarke's *Poetry in Modern Ireland* (1961) and J. J. Campbell's *Legends of Ireland* (1955).<sup>14</sup> He had also worked once with the Dolmen Press: he designed the head and tail piece for Donagh MacDonagh's broadside *Love Duet* (1954).<sup>15</sup> Several years prior to *The Tain* commission, le Brocquy approached Liam Miller with the idea of producing an illustrated book. The project of *The Tain* was, then, one personal to both artist and translator, and should be seen as a collaborative effort fostered by Liam Miller, the *maître d'oeuvre*.

In its design, the Dolmen Edition *Tain* echoes the *livre d'artiste* in every way. Unfortunately, the book's familiar form as a standard Oxford University Press paperback, published in 1970 and still in print today, may confuse this impression. The text of the 1970 edition is complete and the page numbers correspond to the Dolmen Editions original, but the paperback measures only 5 by 8 inches and contains only 33 of le Brocquy's original 136 ink drawings reproduced by photolithography.

The Dolmen Press produced two versions of *The Tain* as Dolmen Edition IX (September, 1969).<sup>16</sup> One of these is a slip-cased, cloth edition of 1700 copies containing color plates and maps. It is printed on paper specially made by Swiftbrook Paper Mills in Dublin. The font used is ten and fourteen point Pilgrim, with Perpetua and Felix titlings in red, as the colophon indicates (*T* [296]). All Dolmen Editions give a detailed colophon, which is one hallmark of the *livre d'artiste* and is known as an *achève d'imprimer*. This printing has an 11 by 7.5 inch page and each page has top and bottom margins of 1.5 and 3.5 inches respectively, with center and side margins of .5 and 2.5 inches. The second version of *The Tain* is a collector's deluxe edition of 50 copies. These were bound in vermilion Oasis Niger goatskin at the Irish University Bindery, with le Brocquy's shield images (*T* 4–5) embossed in gold on the front and back covers. Each copy in this deluxe binding comes individually boxed. Each copy is signed by Kinsella, le Brocquy, and Miller. Each contains an extra suite of the *Warp Spasm* drawings. The production of a deluxe and routine copy is standard practice in the production of the *livre d'artiste*.

The 1970 Oxford University Press trade edition of *The Tain* is itself an illustrated book, but it is not an artist's book. The Oxford *Tain* provides a

14. J. J. Campbell, *Legends of Ireland* (London: Batsford, 1955).

15. Miller, p. 7.

16. The 1969 boxed edition of *The Tain* was also marked in North America by Irish University Press, the distinguishing feature being the IUP mark in red and the bottom of the wrap's spine.



Louis le Brocquy, Shield Drawing, *The Tain* (1969), p. 5. Reproduced by kind permission of the artist.

contrast that helps us better appreciate the Dolmen Edition printing as an artist's book. Most striking is the difference in size, which highlights the importance of spatial considerations in our reading of text, a topic first explored by the French poet Stéphane Mallarmé. The *livre d'artiste* uses the page as an aesthetic and expressive element in itself, and that use is characterized by the presence of generous margins, like those found in *The Tain*. This has the effect of clearing space for the impact of the text and creating a *répos* or white area to rest the eye.

The provision of a *répos* created by generous margins also provides physical space for illustration, which, in the case of *The Tain*, is *in-texte*, or found throughout the text; *hors-texte*, or full plate; and *en-marge*, or in the margins. In total, the Dolmen Edition presents 6 *départs-de-chapître*, illustrations that fall at the end of a story; 7 *débuts-de-chapître*, illustrations that come at the head of a story; 23 *cul-de-lampes*, images at the bottom of a page; 14 full-page plates; and one double spread (*T* [236–37]). At times, the reader sees an image (the “Sixfold Slaughter”) spill from one full plate into the opposite page (*T* 155); or a single illustration (running boys) spread across the bottom of two pages, creating a feeling of continuity (*T* 78–79); or one figure (Ferdia) facing another (Medb) from opposite margins, implying opposition or dialogue (*T* 170–71).

Overall, the Dolmen Editions printing displays great inventiveness in design, with Liam Miller using the restrictions of the book format expressively.



HOW CUCHULAINN WAS BEGOTTEN

**CONCHOBOR** and the nobles of Ulster were at Emain. A flock of birds came to Emain Plain and ate all the plants and grasses out of the ground, and the very roots. The men of Ulster grew angry seeing their land ruined, and got nine chariots ready the same day to chase them away — they were practised hunters of birds. Conchobor mounted the chariot with his sister, the woman Deichtine; she drove the chariot for her brother. The Ulster warriors, Conall and Laegaire and the others, came in their chariots, and Bricriu with them.

The birds flew at will before them across Sliab Fuait, and across Edmonn and Breg Plain — there were no dikes or fences or stone walls in Ireland at that time, only the



The *en-marge* illustrations can be extremely playful, like the images of Sétanta (the young Cúchulainn) playing hurley in “Cuchulainn’s Boyhood Deeds” (T 81).

The presence of marginal illustrations throughout the Dolmen Edition silhouettes the text. The Oxford printing offers no marginal illustrations, and is limited to 33 drawings: the *débuts-de-chapître*, *départs-de-chapître*, and the full plate. In this context, le Brocquy’s drawings have a less expressive, more decorative role reminiscent of the artist’s earlier illustrations for the Clarke and Campbell books and do not integrate fully with Kinsella’s text. The fine paper of the original printing, having no grain, also creates a much sharper image, thus giving each of le Brocquy’s 136 drawings a stronger impact.

Unity of image and text in the *livre d’artiste* is traditionally achieved through a correspondence between the fonts of type—in this case, Pilgrim, Perpetua, and Felix—and illustrations, as can be seen in *The Tain*. In process and final appearance, the medium of the ink brush drawing is one sympathetic with a literary text. The reader can perceive both simultaneously without being distracted by the intrinsic, graphic qualities of the drawings. The strong linear quality of le Brocquy’s illustrations coheres with the upright, unfussy Pilgrim font, which is also suited to the direct tone of Kinsella’s translation. The *lettrine*, or initial letter, plays an important function in the *livre d’artiste*, and it can be seen here as a strong integrating element, as it is applied to the initial word of each tale.<sup>17</sup> The bold font of the *lettrine* echoes the dense black of le Brocquy’s images, creating a fine balance between the literary and the visual symbol. These formal elements make it clear that *The Tain* is a production of carefully choreographed visual information, one comparable with the unity of Verlaine’s language, Bonnard’s arabesques, and the floral font in *Parallelement*.

In *The Tain*, le Brocquy employs an interpretive type of illustration also employed in Vollard’s setting of *Parallelement*. Unlike literary or decorative illustration, interpretive illustration implies a style that is figurative without being directly descriptive of the text.<sup>18</sup> Most often used to represent themes of archetypal significance, interpretive illustration is well suited to evoking the spirit of *The Tain* in a suggestive, symbolic manner. The *début-de-chapître* illustration plays an important role in setting tone and atmosphere, and a good example of this is the ink drawing of a flock of hovering birds set over the introduction to “How Cúchulainn Was Begotten,” set in red capitals (T 21). Le Brocquy’s image refers to the birds that ate the plain of Emain Macha bare:

17. Titles of the main sections of *The Tain*, of parts of the apparatus, and of several individual tales are also given in red, following a design pattern on the wrap and the title page.

18. W. J. Strachan, *The Artist and the Book in France* (London: Peter Owen, 1969), p. 18.

Pleasant and lovely was the flight of the birds, and their song. There were nine scores of birds with a silver chain between each couple. Each score went in its own flight, nine flights altogether, and two birds out in front of each flight with a yoke of silver between them. (T 22)

The birds have a strange and prophetic presence in the strange story of Deichtine's impregnation and its suggestion of incest. By focusing his ink drawing on the shapes of the birds' flight and on the shapes of their wings, le Brocquy evokes the forboding mood rather than describing realistic detail.

As practised by le Brocquy, this sort of drawing effectively creates a pictorial symbolism that corresponds well with the wealth of strange visions and prophesies in *The Tain*. A most powerful instance of this is le Brocquy's full-page image of the raven facing the speech of the Morrigan to the Brown Bull (T [99]). The raven image presages disaster. It appears first in the "Exile of the Sons of Uisliu" where a raven drinking blood on snow anticipates Noisiu's death (T 11); again in the "Death of Maenén" where Morrigan speaks of "ravens ravenous among the corpses of men" (T 98); and finally in "The Last Battle" in a lament: "Ravens gnawing / men's necks / blood spurting / in the fierce fray" (T 238). The repetition of the raven symbol in the text and in le Brocquy's crude rendering in black ink (T 11, T 99, T 238) establishes a mood of foreboding and tragedy. That the image appears three times—the first and last *en-marge* and the second as a full plate—is also important, as such repetitions are a favorite device in the sagas.

In a very similar way, the textual and graphic image of the bull immediately comes to represent conflict. The two bulls in the saga are the Brown Bull of Cuailgne—"horrific, overwhelming, ferocious"—Finnbennach, "born to bear victory, bellowing in greatness" (T 49–50). Following their fearsome description, they are graphically represented facing each other mirror-wise at the bottom of the page—the first a *départ-de-chapitre*, the second a *début-de-chapitre* (T 50–[51]). In the rough, gestural marks of these drawings, le Brocquy captures a powerful, unmoving strength, and the feeling of their opposition is intensified by the obstruction implied by the page break. These illustrations have the tension and strength to launch the reader into the main narrative of *The Tain*. As a symbol of brutality central to the saga, the bull appears twice more (T 55, 125), but on the final page, the image has different role. The two bulls appear prostrate, one above the other, as a *cul de lampe* conveying visually a sense of finality.

Many of le Brocquy's brush drawings for *The Tain* have an elusive, enigmatic quality that leads to sensitive symbioses between verbal text and visual image. Le Brocquy's images often seem to rise implicitly from abstract, calligraphic marks as they are described in Kinsella's text; once recognized, how-

ever, they shape our reading of the text. This interrelationship is especially evident in the *départ-de-chapître*. For example, the image falling at the end of “The Death of Aife’s One Son”—a brutal account of Cúchulainn’s killing of his own seven-year-old son by “bringing his bowels down around his feet” (*T* 44)—is at first unrecognizable. Following the tale’s final line—“For the space of three days and three nights no calf in Ulster was let go to its cow on account of his death” (*T* 45)—le Brocquy’s image becomes identifiable, like the psychologist’s inkblot, as a cow suckling a calf. The role of the *départ-de-chapître* is to arrest the reader’s attention before he moves on to the next story, and, as a final visual meditation on “The Death of Aife’s One Son,” this image lays emphasis on the tragedy, rather than the brutality, of the text.

The importance of the enigmatic quality of le Brocquy’s illustrations to *The Tain* is highlighted by the shield image as a cover design (*T* 5).<sup>19</sup> Extremely abstract and suggestive, the shield image chosen by Miller as the frontispiece epitomizes an element central to the book. Le Brocquy describes this as a representation of the “virtual shield of the fabulous hero Cúchulainn and, indeed, of this archetypal Celtic warrior himself,” and notes that “paradoxically this explosive emergent image can also be interpreted as implosive, immergent, accretive.”<sup>20</sup>

If we look at le Brocquy’s early paintings, we see that these immergent and emergent qualities are inherent in the artist’s work from the start. In the 1944 painting *Famine Cottages*, le Brocquy captures, in the words of Earnan O’Malley, “the dual quality in the landscape that can induce a merging or withdrawal” as fragments of the cottages appear and retreat into atmospheric color.<sup>21</sup> The same qualities become more apparent in the elusive vestiges of le Brocquy’s “presences” series—as in the oil painting *Male Presence* (1958)—and in the later series of “ancestral heads”—as in *Evoked Head* (1964)—where the head is barely released from the surface that envelops it.<sup>22</sup>

In his *Tain* illustrations, the ability of le Brocquy’s drawings to emerge and dissolve gives fitting expression to the peculiar marriage of mysticism and raw physicality contained in Kinsella’s text. Like gestures of primeval fear, strength, or passion, the “explosive” energy of the brushwork captures the physical exu-

19. The abstract shield emblem (*T* 5) appears stamped in gold on the red front cover of the deluxe edition of *The Tain*. The cloth edition of 1700 copies has a front cover giving the bull emblem, stamped in white, in the bottom right corner. The cloth trade edition issued by Oxford University Press (1970) presents the shield emblem, stamped in white, in the center of the front board.

20. Walker, p. 148.

21. Walker, p. 63.

22. Walker, p. 200; McPharland, p. 96.



Louis le Brocquy, “Cúchulainn’s Warp-Spasm,” *The Tain* (1969), *en marge*, p. 153. Reproduced by kind permission of the artist.

berance of the text, as can be seen in the images of “bodily matters” and of violence, as in the several drawings of Cúchulainn’s “warp spasm” (*T* 151, 152, 153). The earthiness of the narrative is, however, dislocated by its fantastical elements: Nes’s pregnancy lasts three years and three months (*T* 3); Medb’s “gush of blood” fills “three great channels, each big enough to take a household” (*T* 250); Cúchulainn’s liver flaps in his mouth and throat (*T* 150). In retaining a certain abstraction, le Brocquy’s drawings suggest the magical, the fantastical character of the Ulster saga. In Liam Miller’s setting, Kinsella’s text and le Brocquy’s images function together as a whole, the illustrations forming in le Brocquy’s words “an extension of the text,” thus qualifying *The Tain* as a *livre d’artiste*.

Numerous Continental influences on the style of le Brocquy's drawings for *The Tain* can be traced. For example, the artist spent time in Spain in 1956 where he was "tremendously struck by the way shadow there looked more real than the substance it was cast by."<sup>23</sup> It is likely that le Brocquy saw the brush drawings of Picasso there, and their influence may be detected in, for example, le Brocquy's drawings of the brown and white bulls of the saga (*T* 51). Le Brocquy's drawings also possess qualities of Japonisme, specifically the style of "boneless painting," which aspires to capture the spirit of the object or subject through simplicity and understatement. The economical, calligraphic brushwork of le Brocquy's depictions of Queen Medb (*T* 59, 242), for example, communicates the strength and determination of her character. Writing in 1970, the Irish poet John Montague compared the mescaline drawings of the French poet Henri Michaux to le Brocquy's rendering of the "hosting" or battle scenes in *The Tain* (*T* 237–38), and le Brocquy may well have been influenced by Michaux, who had exhibited in Dublin in 1959.<sup>24</sup> Le Brocquy attaches great importance to the unconscious element of his work—to the "significant accident."<sup>25</sup> That approach also links le Brocquy's artistry to that of such Abstract Expressionists as Jackson Pollock and Willem de Kooning.

Appropriately, le Brocquy's *Tain* drawings relate equally well to ancient and native Irish processes of animation as seen in the Corlech Head or the Celtic Crosses, where the subject is suggested with as little imposition and interference as possible. The act of painting is, of course, a reversal of the process of stone carving, but the brushwork of le Brocquy's painting expresses a similar feel for material and avoids a literary art through, in his own words, "the transmutation of the image into paint."<sup>26</sup> The *Tain* drawings can be seen then as a natural response to the medium of brush drawing in ink. Just as his landscapes reflect the subtlety of watercolors, and his "presences" make use of the expressive texture of oil paint, so too do these drawings adhere to the inherent nature of the ink. Le Brocquy's images for *The Tain* have the immediacy and sureness of the calligraphic mark, yet they retain also the feel of the splash of ink. Indeed, the restrictions of the medium help display the qualities that penetrate all of le Brocquy's work.

The *Tain* drawings were themselves exhibited at the International Exhibition of Modern Drawing in Yugoslavia in 1968. The following year, le Brocquy took the key images of the book and translated them into a series of large-scale lithographs. In 1970, he took up the *Tain* theme again in his tapes-

23. Walker, p. 79.

24. John Montague, "Ulster Bull Fight" [Rev. of Kinsella's *Tain*], *The Guardian*, 27 November 1970.

25. George Morgan, *Louis le Brocquy: The Head Image* (Cork: Gandon Editions, 1995), p. 5.

26. Walker, p. 53.



Louis le Brocquy, "The Brown Bull of Cuailnge," *The Tain* (1969), *debut de chapitre* at bottom of page under title in red, p. [51]. Reproduced by kind permission of the artist.



Pablo Picasso, "Bull," *The Sketchbooks of Picasso*, ed. Arnold and Marc Glimcher (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1986), p. 242.

try for the Carroll's cigarette factory in Dundalk. Titled *The Hosting of the Táin*, this tapestry portrays a series of faces or "heads" in many colors that suggest a "gathering" for the cattle raid and, viewed at a distance, merge into waves of color, and then appear again as a distinctive massed image.<sup>27</sup> This tapestry and later *Táin* tapestries—like the yellow-and-black *Men of Connaught* (1973)<sup>28</sup>—achieve the same effect as the double-spread battle scene in *The Tain* (T 236–37), a primitive evocation of a mass presence. These tapestries may be seen as anticipating le Brocquy's recent "presences" paintings, like *River Run, Procession with Lilies, IV* (1992).<sup>29</sup>

Following the publication of *The Tain* in 1969, le Brocquy illustrated six books, all of which form a coherent body of work. For Liam Miller and the Imprint Society in 1970, le Brocquy depicted characters from J. M. Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* as "masks." These six faces, each distinguished by a vivid combination of two colors, resemble the vividly colored heads in *The Hosting of the Táin* tapestry, as in the case of *Orange Mask for the Widow Quin*.<sup>30</sup> Le Brocquy again turned to ink brush drawing in 1977 for the Dolmen Edition of Desmond O'Grady's *The Gododdin*, a series of poems adapted from the Welsh telling of the annihilation of the Gododdin tribe; these drawings use variations of the raven symbol from *The Tain*.<sup>31</sup> In 1979, Le Brocquy illustrated Seamus Heaney's *Ugolino*, translated from an Dante's *Inferno*, which can be linked both to Kinsella's *The Tain* and O'Grady's *The Gododdin*, for all deal with ancient myths, feuds, and themes that "mesh with and house the equivalent destructive energies at work, say, in contemporary Belfast."<sup>32</sup> The long conflict in Northern Ireland is a theme in le Brocquy's painting *Northern Image* (1971).<sup>33</sup> The "Troubles" find direct expression in le Brocquy's cover design for Kevin Cahill's *Irish Essays* (1980), a proposal of possible solutions for the situation in Northern Ireland. There the artist depicts two groups of

27. Walker, p. 93.

28. Walker, p. 144.

29. George Morgan, *Louis le Brocquy: Procession* (Cork: Gandon Editions, 1992), p. 30.

30. J. M. Synge, *The Playboy of the Western World*, ed. Stanley Sultan (Barre, MA: Imprint Society, 1970), p. [85]. Signed by le Brocquy, this slip-cased edition of Synge's drama offers six polychrome brush drawings, or "masks," portraying the characters of the drama, the *Yellow Mask for Christy Mahon* (p. [73]) repeated as a frontispiece and stamped in gold on the yellow front board of the binding.

31. Desmond O'Grady, *The Gododdin, a Version*, Dolmen Editions XXVI (Dublin: The Dolmen Press, November 1977). The title page terms le Brocquy's illustrations "ink paintings," and le Brocquy's preface calls the bird images "rooks."

32. Seamus Heaney, *Ugolino* (Dublin: Andrew Carpenter, 1979). Seamus Heaney, "On Irish Expressionist Painting," *The Irish Review*, 3 (1988), 63.

33. Walker, p. 200.

people, in the style of the *Tain* battle scene (*T* 236–37) converging to represent a single society.<sup>34</sup> In 1981, le Brocquy produced a series of color lithographs portraying eight Irish writers—including James Joyce—published by Andrew Carpenter as a portfolio of unbound images.<sup>35</sup> In one of the very last Dolmen Editions, le Brocquy illustrated Joyce’s *Dubliners* (1985), and again with ink brush drawings.<sup>36</sup>

The illustrations for *The Tain* prove centrally important to le Brocquy’s artistry. They represent a revitalizing of Irish mythology that brought to Irish writing a necessary vitality and to Irish art an alternative to “images of thatched cottages arranged like dominoes under convenient hills.”<sup>37</sup> The publication of the Dolmen Edition itself had a revitalizing effect on Irish art. The 1970 *Tain* proved to be an inspiration for artists like Conor Fallon, Brian Bourke, and the sculptor John Behan, who cast his first bull wile working alongside le Brocquy in 1970. Liam Miller’s formal design for the Dolmen *Tain* integrates Kinsella’s text with le Brocquy’s drawings, thus creating an aesthetic object that itself deserves Buckland Wright’s description of the *livre d’artiste* as an “asset of intrinsic value . . . no less worthy of attention than any other artistic production.”<sup>38</sup> In the context of le Brocquy’s art, the project of illustrating Kinsella’s translation of the *Táin Bó Cuailnge* reveals the character of his earlier work, influences on his later output, and the often ignored literary nature of le Brocquy’s art. The Dolmen Editions *Tain*, then, is a uniquely Irish equivalent of the French *livre d’artiste* and must be seen and valued as much for its artistic as for its literary interpretation of the Ulster saga.

☞ CRAWFORD COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN, CORK

34. *Irish Essays*, ed. Kevin Cahill (London: Batsford, 1980).

35. Louis le Brocquy, *Eight Irish Writers*, ed. Andrew Carpenter (Dublin 1981).

36. James Joyce, *Dubliners*, Dolmen Editions (Dublin: The Dolmen Press, 1985). This last Dolmen Edition was published in an edition of 500. It has the same proportions as *The Tain* (1969), is bound in Irish linen with embossed decorations on the cover, and is boxed in a tan, cloth-covered slipcase.

37. Walker, p. 91.

38. Strachan, p. 18.