Doubtless indebted to John Harris for his groundbreaking 1998 work (*Adaptations of Roman Epic in Medieval Ireland*), Miles reveals an honest self-appraisal in his introduction, where he describes this volume on ‘medieval Irish classicism’ as fitting more or less into reception studies: ‘It is a central thesis of this book, however, that the reception of the classics in Ireland was always intimately bound up with the production of native literature in the vernacular’ (13). Then, when we jump to the penultimate chapter’s conclusion, he opines, regarding the *Táin*, that it was doubtless ‘[...] written in a library, the contents of which were not restricted to native *senchas*’ (193). In the intervening one-hundred-and-eighty pages that cite some five hundred scholarly references, Miles subjects to close examination — among other concerns — the *Togail Troi* (‘Destruction of Troy,’ rewritten from Dares the Phrygian’s *De Excidio Troiae Historia*). This eleventh-century (?) vernacular text with its three recensions Miles reveals to be decisive in the development of the ‘Irish Classical Tales,’ an impressive body of relatively early adaptations (eleventh–thirteenth centuries?) into Irish from Latin sources. These are tenacious and brilliantly original literary works: *grosso modo*, they include the *Scéla Alexandair* (‘The Story of Alexander’), *Imtheachta Aeniasa* (‘The Adventures of Aeneas’), *In Cath Catharda* (‘The Civil War,’ drawing on Lucan’s *Bellum Civile*), *Merugud Uilixis meic Leirtis* (‘The Wandering of Ulysses son of Laertes’), and from Statius, the *Togail na Tebe* (*Thebaid*) and the Irish *Achilleid*. Among others, the lesser-known but fascinating *Finghala Chlainne Tanntail* (‘The Kin-Murders of the Children of Tantalus’) brings the Troy story genre and its scatterlings to a dramatic conclusion.
Miles, also in his introduction, underscores the duality or ambiguity in the opposing colophons of the Táin (Book of Leinster version, one Irish, the other Latin), while citing Augustine’s use of *figmenta poetica* (‘inventions’) as distinct from *historia* in Christian usage. A rapid summary of antecedent research forcefully highlights the complexity of the assertion by Miles that *Togail Troí* and the earliest recension of the Táin are contemporaries (eleventh century; see especially 53–54). Chapter One, ‘Classical Learning in Medieval Ireland’ suggests to us that, in many ways, the volume intends to refute Carney’s critics: classical learning in medieval Ireland was unarguably pervasive, as the body of Irish Classical tales demonstrates. It is their profound imprint on the surviving native vernacular literature — Irish prose epic in particular — that Miles seeks to establish. Medieval Irish classical studies flourished during the post-Viking *renovatio*, as evidenced by parallel analysis from Hiberno-Latin sources. Intimate knowledge of the texts of Virgil, their commentaries (Servius, Donatus, et al.), those of Statius, in addition to other text-related suggestions provide firm support for not only Latin expertise (mythology and mythography in particular) but also awareness of elements of Greek as well (see, e.g., pp. 16 and 36 on John Scottus). But, Miles observes (circular thinking notwithstanding): ‘Our best evidence for the reading of Latin classics in the later period [i.e., post-Carolingian] is the classical translations themselves’ (43).

Chapter Two, ‘The Irish Classical Tales: Texts and Sources’, focuses on the whole corpus, considered a cycle by some scholars, problematised by their existence in mainly fourteenth-century manuscripts but embodying language from at least the tenth. The author runs through the list of Classical tales, reminding us *en passant*, yet especially and importantly, that ‘[t]he Middle Ages [...] never saw imitation as equivalent to inferiority’ (58). Self-referentiality in these tales suggests scholarly reliance on a given tradition, as perceived ideally in
the *Togail Troí* whose sources comprise a living medieval commentary. Miles shows, through several detailed explications — the Jason and Medea and Hercules episodes — how the Irish *Aeneid* borrowed from the *Togail Troí*, how the latter drew on Virgil and antique Virgilian commentary, Ovid, Lucan, the *Excidium Troiae*, First Vatican Mythographer, and so forth, thus endeavouring to restore ‘[…] in prose […] the Troy of the *poetae* of Greece and Rome’ (94).

*Togail Troí* — its aesthetics, stylistics and ekphrases, plus matters of historiography, genre and literary theory, are broached in Chapter Three, ‘Classicism and *Togail Troí*’, where Miles deals with literary activities like *imitatio* and paraphrase as reflections of an ‘educational culture’ (104) steeped in Latinity and inclined to extend such techniques to the vernacular. The Irish inclination to promote historical writing and the artistic excellence of ancient epic led to adaptations of the Classics. Miles emphasises both *immrama* (voyage tale) and *tochonlud* (a setting forth) as potentially unconvincing adaptable models for the Classical tales: such tale types suggest oral tradition (Mac Cana), yet the presence of both *Togail Troí* and *Scéala Alaxandair* within the Tale List problematises the issue of traditional Irish narrative. He writes: ‘[…] *Togail Troí* is a remarkable attempt to recreate the Troy of Virgil. It is, in fact, more successfully Virgilian that even *Imtheachta Aeniasa*’ (99). Both nativisation and academic admiration for Antiquity are at work in this case, as are specific rhetorical and interpretative strategies like *imitatio, amplificatio, aemulatio*, ekphrasis and similes. Miles demonstrates this with an astonishing display (parallel texts reveal the verbal echoes) of how the Irish adaptor borrowed from the *Aeneid* (114, 118–19).

Chapter Four, ‘*Táin Bó Cúailnge* and Latin Epic’, is, in my opinion, the most important in the book. ‘Strange’ and ‘fantastic’ indeed is this popular crown jewel of pre-historic storytelling. Whether loaded with
Homeric or Virgilian ‘reminiscences’ (Thurneysen) or deriving from a ‘mixed culture’ (both remote pagan and Christian — *viz.* Carney), the *Táin* embodies close ‘heroical’ typological borrowings in *imitatio* from Virgil and Statius (*Aeneid, Thebaid* and *Achilleid*), as a glance at the role of prophecy, the ‘watchman’ motif and Cú Chulainn’s *Macgnimrada* illustrates (163–75). The author’s precise scrutiny of the antecedent orthographic and metrical features, and the numerous allusions, all point to an undeniably deep vein of *aemulatio*.

‘The Rhetorical Set Piece and the *Breslech* of the Plain of Murthemne’ is the final chapter. It treats the techniques of literary prose works and handles in depth the vivid battle iconography and its effect on the hero (*In Carpat Serda 7 in Breslech Mór Maige Murthemne*, ‘The Sickled Chariot and the Great Rout of the Plain of Murthemne’). Miles notes evidence of Biblical and Virgilian ‘flags’ in the episode. A fascinating tour de force exegesis (of the arming of the warrior and the hero’s wrath, *riastrad*, ‘contortion’ — ‘warp-spasm’ for Kinsella, ‘the Torque’ for Carson) draws on imagistic examples of martial rage and grotesque fury as found in *Togail Troí*, the *Aeneid*, Statius’ *Thebaid* and *Achilleid* (and in their medieval glosses and commentaries). The description of Cú Chulainn’s *lúan láith*, ‘hero’s light’ (222–28) is traced to Homer’s Achilles and Diomedes via Virgil and Macrobius. Miles then reinforces his argument that ‘vernacular heroic prose drew on written exercises’ (242) in a final analytic sequence on chariot warfare (the sickled chariot), the related *aristeia* of Amphiarus, the inexpressibility topos, and the recurrence of rhetorical set pieces.

In the ‘Afterword: An Invitation to Study’, Miles raises technical and meta-literary concerns: where do medieval Irish Classical Studies fit in the modern-day curriculum? He further asks, why do we find so little indication of Christianising or typically allegorical mythographic influence in these tales? Without ‘moralistic’ flavour or ‘flags,’ what about
their pragmatic applications? Could it be a humanistic force, as in the European Twelfth-Century Renaissance — as seen most especially in the French *Romans d’Antiquité*, harbinger romances linked to the Carolingian period and produced mainly (but not exclusively) for the Norman-Angevin crown? In the end, Miles observes wryly, ‘It will be a hardy critic […] who will undertake […] to investigate whether Benoît de Sainte-Maure had ever perused a copy of *Togail Troí* (248). Perhaps some young medieval scholar (with expertise in Old French and Irish) will meet that challenge.

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