



Ollscoil na hÉireann
National University of Ireland

A Eagarthóirí, a Ambasadóir, is a chairde Éigse

Mar Sheansailéir na hOllscoile, tá fíor-áthas orm fáiltiú romhaibh go dtí áras na hOllscoile agus is mór an pléisiúr dom na trí foilseacháin breátha seo a chur i bhúr láthair. Is mór ócáid í seo d'Éigse agus ar ndóigh don Ollscoil. Ó bunaíodh Ollscoil na hÉireann beagnach céad bhliain ó shoin, bhíoch áit lárnach ag an Ghaeilge agus ag an Léann Ceilteach i saol agus i bhféiniúlacht na hOllscoile.

Editors, Ambassadors, and friends of Éigse

As Chancellor of the University, it gives me considerable pleasure to be here this evening to celebrate the enlargement of our knowledge of our Gaelic civilisation with the publication of *The Louvain Manuscript Heritage*, the CD of Volumes 1 to 35 of *Éigse* and Meidhbhin Ní Úrdail's index of those volumes. This is a wonderful *Éigse* occasion reflecting a very substantial body of scholarship in the field of Irish Studies which is a source of pride for the University.

Founded at the height of the Celtic revival, the National University of Ireland has always seen Irish and Celtic Studies as central to its academic identity and mission. When funds became available to the University in 1923, in the form of a a bequest from Birmingham

doctor Adam Boyd Simpson, the Senate decided that they should be used among other things to fund the publication of a journal of Irish Studies. This emerged in 1926 with the publication of a journal entitled *Lia Fáil*. The editor of that journal was Dr Douglas Hyde, Dubhghlas de hÍde who, in 1909 had been appointed as the first Professor of Modern Irish in University College Dublin and who was a member of the first NUI Senate. A second volume of *Lia Fáil* was published in 1932, the year of Hyde's retirement from UCD. Douglas Hyde went on of course to become in 1937 the first President of Ireland. In 1938 the NUI Senate approved the *exclusive* use of the Adam Boyd Simpson Fund for the publication of a journal of Irish studies, and Gerard Murphy, Hyde's successor changed the name of the journal to its present form, *Éigse: A Journal of Irish Studies*, the first volume under that name appearing in 1939.

Sixty-eight years and thirty-five volumes later, *Éigse* has consistently been a most distinguished journal of international standing, edited to the highest academic standards, attracting contributions from leading scholars at home and abroad. On a personal note I want to say that although my facility with the Irish language has receded since I left Colaiste ne Rinne 71 years ago, nevertheless I always find something in *Eigse* from which I can derive benefit

I am particularly pleased to have the opportunity this evening to pay a special tribute to *Éigse's* editor, Professor Pádraig Breatnach, for what he has achieved during his stewardship, not only in continuing the tradition of *Éigse* but in enhancing the standing of the journal, extending its Advisory Board, and now modernising its accessibility through making it available also on CD. The Registrar and staff of NUI are collaborating with Pádraig

in seeking to promote the journal and make it more widely known and appreciated. The National University of Ireland is hugely indebted to him for his work.

It is also most encouraging to see younger scholars involved in these publications in the persons of Dr Caoimhín Breatnach and Dr Meidhbhín Ní Úrdail . This gives grounds for some optimism in relation to the future of Irish Studies and the capacity of the discipline to continue to attract talented scholars interested in mining the richness of our cultural heritage. But for that to happen it is essential that our universities, and the constituent universities of the NUI in particular maintain and expand their traditional support for research in Old and Middle Irish and in Early Irish History. I have found it disturbing that some posts in these disciplines have been discontinued - just when our increased prosperity has been providing us with additional resources for research into the history of our distinctive Gaelic civilisation and culture..We should not become so obsessed with future economic /development as to neglect the rich heritage of our past.

Dr Meidhbhín Ní Úrdail has been responsible for compiling the Index to Éigse Volumes 1 – 35. In a most impressive and very useful contribution, Meidhbhín has indexed the journal under six categories: General, Places, Words Usages and Forms, Initial Lines, Publications Reviewed and Contributors. She carried out this work as the holder of the NUI Fellowship in Celtic Studies and it is most gratifying to see this impressive output from the Fellowship - one of the innovations in our award system that I have been especially happy to promote during the decade of my Chancellorship of the NUI

I am delighted to welcome the Belgian Ambassador His Excellency, Mr. Leopold Carrewyn here this evening for the launch of the publication of *The Louvain Manuscript Heritage*. The publication is concerned with the Irish Franciscan manuscript collection now housed in University College Dublin and includes the proceedings of a related conference held in UCD. 2007 is the four hundredth anniversary of the Irish Franciscan College in Louvain, funded by King Philip III of Spain, then the ruler of this part of the Low Countries. This occasion has been wonderfully celebrated in Ireland and in Belgium with a fascinating programme of commemorative events and as the anniversary year comes to an end, NUI is pleased to be associated with Louvain 400 in this publication.

As one commemoration draws to a close, we are about to start another. The National University of Ireland was founded on 2nd December 1908 so we regard today as the start of our centenary year and this event as the first in a programme of events which will reach their culmination this time next year. I think that it is more than fitting that we should start the celebration of one hundred years of NUI with the launch of these remarkable *Éigse* publications.

Cuirimid tús anocht le Comóradh Céad Bhliain Ollscoil na hÉireann. Bunaíodh an Ollscoil ar an Dara Lá de mhí na Nollag sa bhliain Míle Naoi gCéad is a hOcht agus beidh clár ceiliúraidh againn i rith na bliana romhainn. Tá sé thar a bheith oiriúnach tús a chur leis an bhliain le láinseáil na bhfoilseacháin seo. Treaslaím go mór leis na héagarthóirí agus leis na húdair chomh maith. Gura fada buan sibh agus bhur léann. Guím rath agus bláth ar *Éigse* amach anseo.