

## Reviews

***Céard Tá sa Bhosca* by Áine Ní Ghlinn, drawings by Aongus Ó Coileáin published by An Gúm, Dublin, no date, 39 pp.**

For the last several years the North American Association for Celtic Language Teachers has been offering a prize for a newly-published children's book in any of the Celtic languages. Not only must the entries be written in a Celtic language but they must also have been composed originally in a Celtic language. Thus children's books in a Celtic language which are translated from English or any other language are excluded from the competition.

Each year the number and quality of books entered in the competition has been increasing. And each year it becomes more difficult for the prize committee to select a winner. The majority of entries are in Irish Gaelic, Scottish Gaelic or Welsh. Only rarely has there been a Cornish, Manx or Breton item in the competition.

The winner of the prize for 2003 was *Céard Tá sa Bhosca* by Áine Ní Ghlinn, with drawings by Aongus Ó Coileáin published by An Gúm, Dublin, 2003, 39 pp. The committee felt this book would be enjoyed by children as they follow the story of Seán and his box and seek to find the answer to the question "What is in the box?" Many young readers and adults will also enjoy the colorful humorous illustrations. The committee also believed that the book could be a useful tool for adult learners of Irish who are in the early stages of study. It could be used quite profitably in conjunction with Irish courses at several levels. Teachers could quite easily incorporate the basic premise of the book into a class exercise by bringing a box into class filled with various items and then asking the question "Céard tá sa bhosca?" Students would proffer such guesses as "An bhfuil úll sa bhosca?" "An bhfuil bó sa bhosca?" etc. etc.

Áine Ní Ghlinn has produced a number of other fine books for children and teenagers. She is also a noted poet and has published several volumes of poetry including *Unshed Tears: Deora Nár Caoineadh* which includes English translations of her poetry.

We congratulate Ms. Ní Ghlinn on her fine work and look forward to her future productions. Go mba fada buan í!

**Reviewed by Ken Nilsen**  
*St. Francis Xavier University*

**Cownie, Alun Rhys. (2001) *A Dictionary of Welsh and English Idiomatic Phrases*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press. xvii + 299 pp.**

**Jones, Ceri. (2001) *Dweud eich Dweud: Geiriadur o Idiomau Cymraeg*. Llandysul: Gwasg Gomer. xvii + 265 pp.**

These two volumes constitute the first significant and fairly comprehensive attempts to document idiomatic Welsh for the non-native speaker. According to their prefaces, both authors also believe their work will prove useful to native speakers, in part to stem the tide of English idioms which get translated word for word into Welsh at the expense of native Welsh idioms. Dictionaries of idiomatic language are therefore a very timely contribution to the growing pedagogical and linguistic literature on the Welsh language.

The task that Cownie and Jones set themselves is decidedly not an easy one, for spoken and even written Welsh presents a wide range of variation in pronunciation and morphology, and reflects varying degrees of interference from English. Both authors generally opted to exclude idioms that are clearly inspired by English models. Cownie points to the difficulty that arises in attempting to decide what to include, referring to phrases which are "at present on the vague border between acceptable and unacceptable Welsh" (p. viii). He acknowledges the subjective nature of such choices and states that "no doubt there are entries that will displease some Welsh speakers." Yet on the whole this selective policy seems like a sensible way of approaching the problems posed by the bilingualism of modern Welsh speakers, even if it renders these works something less than purely objective

descriptions of idiomatic Welsh as it is currently spoken in many communities.

Cownie's book includes about 12,000 idiomatic expressions in its Welsh to English and English to Welsh sections combined. Since the latter section "is aimed at helping the learner to express himself or herself in spoken or written Welsh," contextual examples (constructed by the author) are frequently included to illustrate usage. Cownie operated with a broad definition of idiom that includes not only phrases like mynd i'w llawes hi 'to curry her favor' (lit. 'to go into her sleeve'), but also single word terms and their idiomatically appropriate preposition (e.g. galw ar 'to call on,' angharedig wrth 'unkind to' etc.). Cownie's book should prove very useful to learners who are eager to enrich their idiomatic spoken or written Welsh. Jones' volume is Welsh-English only, though an English-Welsh reference index is included to facilitate locating desired articles. Subtitled (on the title page but not on the cover) as "A Guide to Colloquial and Idiomatic Welsh," the goal of this volume is considerably broader than that of Cownie's book. Many of Jones' entries were included simply to indicate a colloquial or dialectal pronunciation, e.g. gwddwg 'throat' and grindo 'to listen' found in South Wales, or gwadd 'to invite' from North Wales (cf. Standard Welsh gwddf, gwrando, and gwahodd). Nearly every entry is glossed with at least one illustrative sentence drawn from a post-1960 written source. The works cited vary widely in character, from literary to journalistic to colloquial to heavily dialectal, but this inclusiveness is warranted in that speakers (and writers) readily draw on these different levels in their everyday usage to a degree not found in English. It is clear that Jones' work is intended more to help people interpret the Welsh they read and hear than to produce it themselves, a respectable mission insofar as every Welsh learner has had the frustrating experience of running across words while reading that are not listed in any of the standard dictionaries. Nonetheless, inclusion of information about part of speech and noun gender would have greatly increased the usefulness of this dictionary for the learner, and such an omission is rather surprising. Jones' book includes 52 pages of appendices outlining features of the verb system of colloquial Welsh and giving some information about Welsh dialects.

It might be expected that Cownie's and Jones' works would overlap greatly in terms of content, but in fact even a brief examination reveals material given in one but not in the other. For instance, in Cownie but not in Jones, one finds rhoi llaw am ei gwddw 'to be kind to her in order to gain some reward' (lit. 'to put a hand around her throat'), nerth corff ac enaid 'with all one's might' (lit. 'strength of body and soul'), maneg weddw 'an odd glove (one only of a pair)' (lit. 'widowed glove'), and mesur ei hyd 'to fall and lie full-length' (lit. 'to measure one's length'). On the other hand, Jones gives some idioms not included by Cownie including bwrw haul 'to rain in the sunshine' (lit. 'to rain sun'), mewn cachiad 'in a flash/jiffy' (lit. 'in a shitting'), sgod a sgod 'fish and chips' (truncated forms of pysgod 'fish' and asglodion 'chips'), and wedi llyncu pryf (copyn) 'pregnant' (lit. 'having swallowed a spider'). Given this differential coverage of idiomatic Welsh, many students will find it rewarding to have both works on hand rather than choosing between them.

**Reviewed by Kevin J. Rottet**

*The University of Wisconsin-Whitewater*