living language. Lovers of folk wisdom can be grateful for the efforts of those who compiled collections of proverbs, the blood and marrow of Ireland’s Gaelic past.

Works Cited

Starting with this issue of the JCLL, we will include a section entitled Learner’s Showcase presenting original essays, poems or short stories written by learners of Celtic languages. We invite submissions from learners or from their teachers. Pieces should be kept to no more than 1,000 words (longer pieces may be considered on occasion, though you may be asked to shorten a longer text). When submitting a piece for consideration please also include a translation or a summary in English. When possible we will publish the translation as well as the Celtic language text.

Leathanach 996

Colleen Dollard

Idir riach agus riachtanach
ta focal in easnamh
a bhághann mise ina cheap.

Nuair a phléigh mé é, ní fhuaire mé ach
‘Tá an riach imithe orthu,
na daoine sa chathair seo,
ag cumadh a bhfocal féin’
ó na fir críonna sa comhrá
óna gcathaoirseach sa chúinne.

‘Ach cad é an focal ceart, mar sin?’
Ní raibh a fhios acu,
id iocún go tobann, ag smaoinigh go dtí—
‘Ach léireoidh mé duit más mian,
a stóirín,’ arsa duine acu,
leath-chúthaileach, leath-mhaíteach,
Between a Rock and a Hard Place

Between ‘Go to hell’ and ‘I need you’ there’s something missing.
I’m still stuck on a word.

When I asked around, though, all I got was ‘They’re all gone to hell in a hand basket, the people in this town making up their own words.’ from the completely correct curmudgeons on their corners of conversation.

‘But what IS the right word?’ I queried. They didn’t know, pausing, pondering quietly, until—
One piped up, ‘But I’d be happy to show you...’ shyly boastful, all laughing now, thrilled with his cleverness.
‘But you could only be as good as your word...’
My response nearly lost in the din
‘... And with no word for it, how could we talk about it? What, with no chance for an aftermath chat? Why bother, for where’s the fun in that?’ I wonder out loud.

Is there a planet out there anywhere between Mars and Venus where our words could work out some common denominator wordlessly?
Surely, there’s a root word,
a prehistoric one lost, hiding
somewhere in a dusty library drawer
that would stand for what we need,
fulfil all parties' requirements and
leave our emotions mutually satisfied,
showing us where our paths once together, diverged

I'll not find it perpetually
staring the dictionary down,
reading between the lines,
pleading the missing word
to magically reveal itself to me.
But is it true what they say:
The unspoken word doesn't hurt?

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**Pontydd**

Ginny Grove

**Editor's note:** Every summer, Cymdeithas Madog concludes its weeklong residential Welsh language course with its own mini-Eisteddfod or literary competition. This piece by Ginny Grove of Denver, CO, was the winning poem at the highest level of competition at the course held in Indianola, Iowa in July 2008. The topic for that level of competition was “Pontydd” (Bridges). Ginny also wrote the English translation of her winning Welsh text.

“A fo ben, bid bont.” Gwerthfawr ydyw geiriau’r hen gawr.
Nid i wr gwan bach ydyw
gario llwyth sydd bod yn lwy.
Dros ei gorff ei hun cerddant
a’i waed coch torriff eu chwant.

Brenin uchel un dydd ddaceth
o Lwerddon, gan arfaeth
trwy briodi morwyn lan
codi bont dros fwr llydan.
Bendigeidfran gan ei chwaer
wnaeth y bont—bu’n bensaer.
Branwen brydferth bydd yn gref,
gan ei gwr elai adref.
Ond yr oedd hi’n aberth prid:
Yn eu pont yr oedd gwendid.
Bron à gallwyd oll eu hedd:
daeth Efniisen i’r wledd.

Torrodd sylfaen wan eu gwaith, ond nid oeddwyth heb obaith.
Am atgyweiri’r bont săl
talodd Brân iddo iawndal.
Aethant heb bryder dros y don
y pár priod i Iwerddon.
Ond parhái, wedi’r hen ddig,
craciau dwfn anweledig.

A pwy a ddechreuodd sôn
y tal am yr ebolion?
A pwy gymhellodd y gred
rhaid cosbi gwraig ddiniwed?
Ef ydoedd gan gelwydd hon
torrodd deyrnas Iwerddon.
Ond ys bai i’r breini am fiol
am ei farn gamsyniol.

Bob dydd cosbodd cygudd cas
Branwen gan bonclus ddiolas.
Dagrau halld ar ei boch main
syrthient yn boeth heb uaid.
Cwoyd pyrth y wlad i gyd;
bu dim dianc o’i thristlyd.
Dan y dŵr heb lef heb don
cwympasai’r bont yn ddison.

Wedi amser, neges ddaeth
i Brân am ei chaethwasaeth.
I’r gorllewin hirbell las
edrychodd, a galanas
bu’n ei feddwl—llifoedd gwaed
talai am boen ei gydwaed.
Nid oedd nawr bont—croesi’r môr,
bu’n rhaid iddo fod yn flaenor,
a cherdded trwy’r dyfnder mawr
yn tynnu’i longau llwythfawr.

Gwelodd Gwyddelod ei ben
gan ddial ar ei dalcen.
Rhedodd pob un gan y gair
i’w brein am ei gadair.
Dwedodd wrthnant i dorri i lawr
pont dros afon llifeifawr.
Byddent yn ddiogel iawn
er eu bod yn anghyfiawn.

A sut i ddweud yr hanes du
o Iwerddon a’i tyngu?
Pan ddaeth nifer Brân i’r min
bu dim gobaith i’w gwerin.
Tân, cledyf, angau mawr,
dinistriad coch enfawr.
Dim ond saith o’yr ddaeth nôl
o’u brwydro gwaedlifol.
made the bridge—he was chief builder. Beautiful Branwen would be strong, with her husband she would go home. But she was a costly sacrifice: in their bridge there was a weakness. Almost lost was all their peace: Efniessien came to the feast.

He broke the weak foundation of their work, but they were not without hope. To repair the sick bridge Brân paid reparation. Without worries, over the wave the married pair went to Ireland. But there persisted, because of that discord, deep unseen cracks [in the bridge].

Who was it began the rumor about the payment of the colts? Who was it compelled the belief that it was necessary to punish an innocent woman? He it was who with this lie broke the realm of Ireland. But there is blame for the foolish king because of his mistaken judgment.

Every day a hateful butcher punished Branwen with a nasty ear-box. Salt tears on her thin cheek fell warmly without wailing.
All the ports of the land were closed; there was no escape from her sorrow. Under the water, without cry, without wave, the bridge collapsed soundlessly.

After a time, a message came to Brân about her slavery. To the far blue west he looked, and a blood price was in his thinking—floods of blood would pay for his blood relative's pain. There was no bridge now—to cross the sea he would have to be the first-goer, and walk through the great depths pulling his heavy-laden boats.

The Irish saw his head with vengeance on his brow. Everyone ran with the word to their king on his chair. He told them to break down the bridge over the great-flowing river. They would be very safe although they were in bad faith.

How to tell the dark tale of Ireland and her fate? When Brân's army came to the brink there was no hope for common folk. Fire, sword, great death, a huge red disaster. Only seven men came back from their blood-flowing battling.

Sad Ireland set out on her ancient woeful journey: five women to fill a land; ages of brother-killing. Branwen saw what would be; this sea she could not bridge. Her strong heart broke in two, her spirit became a starling.

With living red blood as an offering a bridge is raised, not stone on heavy stone. "He who would be head, let him be a bridge," said the old giant; he was blameless. Brân became a bridge gladly; Only his head came home.