

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.

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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
tá focal in easnamh
a fhágann mise ina cheap.

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

'Ach cad é an focal ceart, mar sin?'
Ní raibh a fhios acu,
iad ciúin go tobann, ag smaoiniamh go dtí—
'Ach léireoidh mé duit más mian,
a stóirín,' arsa duine acu,
leath-chúthaileach, leath-mhaíteach,

rí-shásta leis féin, iad uilig ag gáire.
 'Ach ní bheifeá ach chomh maith le d'fhocal
 agus gan focal air conas a labhródh muid faoi?
 Is gan aon comhrá ina dhiaidh,
 cad ab fhiú, cá mbeadh an spraoi?'
 m'aisfhreagra sa beagnach báite sa ghleo.

An bhfuil plainéad amuigh ansin áit ar bith
 idir Mars agus Véineas, a ngluaisfeadh
 ár bhfocail gan focal a rá?
 Nach bhfuil aon fhocal bunúsach ann
 ceann seanda, cailte in áit éicint
 i bhfolach i leabharlann,
 sean-leagan a sheasfadh an fód,
 ag freastal ar an dá thrá
 dár mothúcháin díbhliónacha mar a bhíodh fadó
 roimh na cianta ó scar ár mianta óna chéile

Ní bhfaighidh mé é
 as súile curtha de shíor
 suas síos an leathanach seo
 ag impí ar an bhfocal ar iarraidh
 é féin a athfhoilsiú go draíochtúil.
 Ach an fíor a ndeirtear:
 'Níl dochar san fhocal nach gcantar?'

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?

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 wŷr gwan bach ydyw
 gario llwyth sydd bod yn lyw.
 Dros ei gorff ei hun cerddant
 a'i waed coch torriff eu chwant.

Brenin uchel un dydd ddaeth
 o Iwerddon, gan arfaeth
 trwy briodi morwyn lan
 codi bont dros fôr llydan.
 Bendigeidfran gan ei chwaer
 wnaeth y bont—bu'n bensaer.
 Branwen brydferth bydd yn gref,
 gan ei gŵr elai adref.
 Ond yr oedd hi'n aberth prid:
 Yn eu pont yr oedd gwendid.
 Bron â gollwyd oll eu hedd:

daeth Efnisien i'r wledd.

Torrodd sylfaen wan eu gwaith,
 ond nid oeddynt heb obaith.
 Am atgyweirio'r bont sâl
 talodd Brân iddo iawndal.
 Aethant heb bryder dros y don
 y pâr priod i Iwerddon.
 Ond parhâi, 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 brenin ffôl
 am ei farn gamsyniol.

Bob dydd cosbodd cigydd cas
 Branwen gan bonclust ddiflas.
 Dagrau hallt ar ei boch main
 syrthient yn boeth heb udain.
 Cloewyd pyrth y wlad i gyd;
 bu dim dianc o'i thristlyd.
 Dan y dŵr heb lef heb don
 cwmpasai'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 brenin ar ei gadair.
 Dwedodd wrthynt i dorri i lawr
 pont dros afon llifeirfawr.
 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, cleddyf, angau mawr,
 dinistriad coch enfawr.
 Dim ond saith o wŷr ddaeth nôl
 o'u brwydro gwaedlifol.

Cychwynodd Iwerddon drist
 ar ei llwybr hen amdrist:
 pump gwraig i lenwi gwlad;
 oesoedd o frawdlddiad.
 Gwelodd Branwen beth y bo;
 y môr hwn nad all bontio.
 Torrodd galon gref yn dwy;
 daeth ei hysbryd yn y ddrudwy.

Gan waed byw coch fel offrwm
 gwyd pont, nid maen ar faen trwm.
 "A fo ben, bid bont," meddai
 yr hen gawr; yr oedd heb fai.
 Aeth Brân yn bont yn llawen:
 daeth adref dim ond ei ben.

Bridges

"He who would lead, let him be a bridge." Valuable
 are the words of the old giant.
 Not for a small weak man it is
 to carry the burden of being a leader.
 Over his own body they will walk
 and his red blood will slake their thirst.

A high king one day came
 from Ireland, intending
 through marrying a pure maiden
 to build a bridge over a wide sea.
 Brân the Blessed with his sister

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:
 Efnissien 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.