

## REVIEW

CWRW AM DDIM (A RHESYMAU ERAILL DROS DYSGU'R IAITH).  
(*Free Beer [And Other Reasons to Learn Welsh]*). Llandysul: Gwasg Gomer.  
237 pages. ISBN 978-1-84851-067-8

*Chris Cope. 2009.*

*Reviewed by Courtenay Honeycutt, Indiana University.*

Welsh language learners who have ever used the Internet to study the language have probably heard of Chris Cope. He is the American from Minnesota famous in the Welsh speaking world for having taught himself the language using the BBC's Catchphrase website (now called *Learn Welsh*: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/wales/learnwelsh/>) and then winning a place to study Welsh at Cardiff University. *Cwrw am Ddim* is his first book, and it traces his experiences discovering and learning the language, moving to Wales, completing the first year of his degree, and—in the process—learning about and adjusting to Welsh culture and life. The book also gives an American's perspective on Welsh-centric topics like the Eisteddfod and the dispute of Cardiff's legitimacy as “Cymru go iawn” (real Wales).

The publisher's blurb on the back of the book likens it to a blog entry, declaring it “honest about the quest and trials of one who was disappointed with his native country and attempts to adopt a new

country.”<sup>1</sup> The book is honest—Cope has said that he writes more honestly in Welsh than in English because he has not yet learned how to “BS” in the language (Roberts, 2009)—and this is the main appeal of *Cwrw*. Any learner who has ever lost confidence, or even cried, after immersing themselves in native Welsh-speaking situations will identify with and appreciate Cope’s honest retelling of his experiences among the “Cymry Cymraeg” (Welsh-speaking Welsh), including his first day in a Welsh-language literature course:

Yn seminar gyntaf Llenyddiaeth Gymraeg, dosbarthwyd copiâu oddarn o farddoniaeth gan Mererid Hopwood. Gallaf gofio’n glir edrych ar y peth a meddwl: “... This is nothing more than a page of (stuff) I don’t know. This is not a poem, it’s a list of words I’ve never seen before.” (p. 155)

(In the first Welsh Language Literature seminar, copies of sections of poetry by Mererid Hopwood were distributed. I can clearly remember looking at the thing and thinking, “... This is nothing more than a page of [stuff] I don’t know. This is not a poem, it’s a list of words I’ve never seen before.”)

*Cwrw* is also extremely funny. For example, throughout the book, Cope explains how Americans might perceive a given situation for the benefit of his Welsh audience. These cultural explanations are entertaining for the American reader as well, as they are likely to have had similar thoughts and experiences when faced with something that, while taken for granted by the Welsh, is new or has a different (and often comical) meaning in the United States, such as the word “pasty”:

Af i lawr i ganol y ddinas yn aml er mwyn cael pastai yn y Cornish Bakehouse ar Church Street. Does dim y fath beth â phasteiod yn yr Unol Daleithiau. I ni, mae ‘pasty’ yn rhywbeth a wisgir gan fenyw mewn sioe fwrlesg. (p. 215)

<sup>1</sup>“Mae Cwrw am Ddim yn gofnod blog—onest am ymchwil a helyntion un a siomwyd gan ei wlad enedigol, a’i ymais i fabwysiadu gwlad newydd.” (my translation—CH)

(I go down to the city center often to have a pasty in the Cornish Bakehouse on Church Street. There isn’t anything like pasties in the United States. To us, ‘pasty’ is something worn by a woman in a burlesque show.)

*Cwrw am Ddim* is not necessarily a book for Welsh language learners (like Gomer’s “Cam at y Cewri” series); rather, it is a book written by someone who has learned Welsh, and it is intended for a general Welsh-speaking audience. However, *Cwrw* would be appropriate for high intermediate and/or advanced Welsh language learners, and American learners, in particular, will most likely enjoy it, due to shared cultural commonalities with the author as Americans learning Welsh. Those who are easily offended by foul language (in English and in Welsh) should be warned that the author makes liberal use of profanity in places. However, it is not included merely for “shock value;” rather, it is a direct reflection of the author’s “profiad Cymraeg” (Welsh language experience), and it is part of what makes *Cwrw am Ddim* honest, funny, and relatable.

#### Reference

Roberts, N. [presenter]. (2009, September 1). Rhaglen Nia. Cardiff, UK: BBC Radio Cymru.