ForeWord Reviews

By Hook or by Crook: A Journey in Search of English
David Crystal
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By Crystal's own admission, *By Hook or by Crook* is a linguistic travelogue. Normally a writer of textbooks and dictionaries—utterly self-contained literary worlds—this book takes a meandering path through the Welsh countryside while observing and commenting on the road signs leading to contemporary standard English.

Welsh itself is enough to make one wonder about maps and ancestry. Take the name of this rail stop between Chester and Holyhead: *Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerychwyndrobwll-llantysiliogogogoch.* Crystal takes it apart to show the meaning:

Llan fair pwll gwyn gyll
Church (of) Mary (in the) hollow (of the) white hazel
goger y chwyrn drobwll llan tysilio gogo goch
near the rapid whirlpool (and) church of (St) Tysilio (by the) red cave.

Don't worry: "Locals never use the long name," Crystal reports. "Life is too short."

But linguistic calisthenics and world-record recording is not at all what this book is about. Rather, Crystal's chapters are like dinner conversations: first, we're talking about travel, then movies, then an Anglo-Saxon king of Mercia, then a shepherd in Welshpool who curls his *R* s. Back to movies (who was the model for the Henry Higgins in *My Fair Lady*?), some discussion of food and wine, the Hay Festival, famously clueless famous authors, and on, and on, deliciously. Of course, all revolving around, or poking at the edges of, English.

Crystal was born in Northern Ireland, but grew up in North Wales and Liverpool. Author or co-author of more than one hundred books, he is known for his enthusiasm for linguistic diversity, and famously wrote in *Language Death* (Cambridge) that "All the big trouble spots of the world in recent decades have been monolingual countries—Cambodia, Vietnam, Rwanda, Burundi, Yugoslavia, Northern Ireland." Crystal's delight in differences is evident on every page of this new book, and both natives and tourists will find the conversation witty and wise.