

Irish American Folklore in New England. By E. Moore Quinn. 2009. Palo Alto, CA: Academica Press. ISBN: 9781930901827 (hard cover).

Reviewed by James E. Doan, Nova Southeastern University
(doan@nova.edu).

[Word count: 511 words]

This is a comprehensive study of various genres of folklore which have survived in Irish America, particularly in the New England area. Eileen Moore Quinn has painstakingly compared proverbs; idioms and other customary sayings; foodways; names and nicknames; children's lore; superstitions, charms, and folk beliefs; customs connected with births, weddings, and wakes; blessings, toasts, and prayers; cursing traditions; historical memory; and music, song, and rhyme. She includes examples in Irish Gaelic and/or collected in Ireland compared with North American versions to ascertain whether there is a likely Irish origin for a given item of folklore.

In chapter 2, dealing with the Irish language, Quinn provides convincing evidence of the continuing influence of Irish Gaelic traditions on American expressions, folk beliefs, and customs (e.g., the banshee, from Irish *bean sí* or *sígh* [literally "woman of the Otherworld"] to indicate "a female death messenger," usually connected with the fairy world, or *uisce beatha* [literally "water of life"], from which derives the English word "whiskey"). Some of the etymologies, however, might be challenged: e.g., she suggests the nicknames "bud" or "buddy" are derived from *bodach* (Irish for churl), though they might as easily be derived from English "brother" (compare with English "pal" from Romany *phral*, ultimately derived from Sanskrit *bhraati*, "brother").

The list of proverbs in chapter 4, including Gaelic examples paired with American ones, also seems at first sight quite convincing, though undoubtedly many of these are universal: e.g., "Necessity is the mother of invention" or "Easier said than done." Perhaps Quinn should have suggested that though Irish parallels exist, these are not necessarily the only source. I heard many of these proverbs from my non-Irish Midwestern grandmother (e.g., "A whistling woman and a crowing hen/ always come to some bad end"), which actually scans better than the Irish-American version Quinn includes ("A whistling woman and a crowing hen / Will bring bad luck to the house they're in"), though they suggest much the same idea.

I found the chapter dealing with music, song and rhyme one of the best. More than traditional Irish folktales, which seem to have

disappeared for the most part during the Irish diaspora to America, the folksong tradition seems to have survived and flourished. Quinn includes an excellent repertoire of the types of songs remembered and performed by New England Irish Americans.

Overall, Quinn provides a valuable inventory of Irish-American cultural products

Journal of Folklore Research Reviews
(<http://www.indiana.edu/~jofr/>).