

MOONSCAPE

VOL.III



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About MoonScape

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Editorial

BY TREVOR GREENFIELD

Welcome to the latest edition of *MoonScape*, an online magazine brought to you by Moon Books. In this edition you will find twenty articles written by Moon Books authors and with subjects stretching from the nature of consciousness to the folklore of insects and from dragons to the Greek muses I'm confident you'll find something to pique your interest as well as a new topic or two to explore. As ever, my thanks to all who contributed.

Joining us for this edition is Andrea Redmond, an artist from the Donegal Mountains. Andrea's beautiful painting of the Goddess Aine features on our front cover. Andrea has a PhD in cultural anthropology and her artwork comprises a variety of media from painting to sculpture, oils, stone and wood carving, life-sized sculptures, quilts and wall hangings. She has exhibited in Ireland, Scotland Britain, and Canada.

It is a delight for us that Andrea sought us out and we are hopeful

that, as the magazine gains in popularity and readership we will be able to showcase the talents not just of our writers but of artists, photographers and poets from across the Pagan spectrum.

One final word, on a more controversial subject... that of AI. Some people oppose AI, seeing it as something that takes away the livelihood from creative artists and writers and rides roughshod over copyright. Other see it as an innovative new technology that heralds a new future and offers new artistic possibilities. There is something to be said for both arguments. Moon Books has considered all sides of the argument regarding the use of AI and in collaboration with our authors have decided to use some of its advantages in *MoonScape*. Where authors agree, we have used it to generate banners for articles.

Thank you for dropping by, I hope you find something of interest in our pages.

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Drawing Down The Sun

Hail the Glory of the Sun!

BY RAVEN DIGITALIS

Most Witches are familiar with the ritual procedure of Drawing Down the Moon. Originating in the Gardnerian Book of Shadows, and poetically crafted by the illustrious Doreen Valiente, Drawing Down the Moon is recited during traditional Wiccan Full Moon Esbats. Within the ritual, the Coven's High Priest gives the High Priestess the Fivefold Kiss, ritually kissing points on her body, followed by a call to the Great Goddess in her many forms, requesting that she descend into the body of her Priestess and servant. Upon invocation, the Priestess recites the Drawing Down, often followed by the Charge of the Goddess and sometimes channeled messages for participants.

But what about the mighty sun? Being a Goddess-oriented tradition, Wicca and many other forms of Neopaganism show reverence to the moon and her tides.

Gardner and Valiente never offered a masculine or solar alternative.

In their legendary book *A Witches' Bible* – which I personally feel is an indispensable piece of Craft history – Janet and Stewart Farrar offer a masculine alternative called Drawing Down the Sun, wherein the Priestess invites the Great God into the Priest. Having a similar structure to Drawing Down the Moon, albeit shorter in duration, many Covens have found this procedure to be effective for summoning the Great God while the sun rides high in the sky – an ideal addendum to Sabbat rituals!

Many practitioners of this rite modify the Farras' Drawing Down the Sun by incorporating their own poetry, God-based chants, and masculine affirmations. Many male-positive groups will take the liberty of crafting their own masculine and solar-

based rituals, poetry, and sacred songs focused on the loving qualities of God(s). Because of Witchcraft's malleable and personable nature, modifications such as these are not only permissible but greatly encouraged in modern Craft circles.

Rituals, of course, don't always have to take place with other people. We can practice Drawing Down the Sun on our own terms, in our own ways, in private and solitary settings. Contemplate what the sun means to you and why he should be honored in his many forms. From there, create your own daytime rituals focused on solar veneration.

Additionally, we are discovering that social evolution in the West is catching up with many Indigenous and Asian views of gender as malleable, diverse, and not necessarily restricted to biological sex. We all have energies of the masculine and feminine polarities within us, regardless of sex, sexuality, or gender identity.

While the moon rules the month's cycle, the sun rules both the daily cycle and yearly cycle, such as with the Sabbats and tropical zodiac timing. Consider creating an everyday morning routine to honor and harness solar energy for yourself. Begin by a basking under sunlight at the same time every day; simply face the sun outdoors with arms outstretched, inhaling solar essence and emanating gratitude for light and life itself. During these meditations, listen to your intuition for inspiration about creating your own unique daily solar routine. Expand your morning practice based on your Witchy insights and personal pantheon.

Experiment with utilizing daily solar energy to charge and enchant spells, charms, and magickal tools. Those drawn to Western esoterica may observe zodiac shifts and astrological alignments. Those drawn to Vedic or Yogic paths may practice a brief *Surya Namaskar* (Sun Salutation) routine as part of their morning observation – perhaps even with the addition of traditional Sanskrit mantras to Surya Dev: Hinduism's masculine ruler of the Sun.

Like any aspect of Witchcraft, trusting

personal intuition is essential. As a giver of life and an emblem of the Great God – the co-creator of reality alongside the balancing force of the Great Goddess – the mighty sun deserves to light the path of the Witch just as much as the soft and mystic moon.

Finally, keep in mind the axiom, "as above, so below," which naturally encompasses the saying, "as within, so without." The sun is always accessible energetically, even in the dead of a winter's night! (That just means that it will take a bit more work to harness its strength.) Although not necessary, some apps for the phone and tablet allow users to track exactly where planets and zodiacal configurations are in relation to the user. Whether or not we know the exact whereabouts of the sun, moon, planets, or constellations, we can draw upon their energy from above/without, to mirror and strengthen our connection to them from below/within. Because we ourselves are direct reflections and products of the Universe, all of its energy is at our disposal at any given time. By observing the world around us and utilizing its energy for the greater good, we deepen our own spiritual advancement while helping enrich the lives of others around us during this sacred and fleeting moment of time on earth.

Raven Digitalis (USA) is the author of the forthcoming *Black Magick* horror fiction anthology on Moon Books, alongside *Pagan Portals - Magick for Empaths*.



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MY DRAGON

RACHEL P

BY RACHEL PATTERSON

Dragons have been a part of my life for as long as I can remember. As a child I was always fascinated with fantasy stories, particularly those that included dragons, witches and wizards. I still have several dragon ornaments from my childhood. Every Saturday morning my dad would take us down to the local library and I would come home with a pile of books to devour. In particular I remember sitting down and reading Alice's Adventures in Wonderland from cover to cover in one day. This was closely followed by Through the Looking Glass which of course has the dragonesque creature, the Jabberwocky.

The Hobbit was another firm favourite which has since been read and re-read on many occasions, where I met the dragon Smaug. Even earlier I belonged to a book club at school, I remember the excitement each month when the brochure came out and I got to choose a couple of books. One of those was Green Smoke by Rosemary Manning, the delightful story of a small dragon living in a cave in Cornwall.

Even before I started my Pagan Witchcraft journey, well over thirty years ago now, dragon magic wove

itself into my life. Physically being drawn to dragon ornaments, jewellery and images on clothing but in more subtle ways. My personality has always had a touch of fire dragon to it! Once I was on my Pagan Witchcraft pathway when my Craft name found me, of course it contained essence of dragon. The first part being 'Tansy', with my love of native herbals, the second part naturally falling in place as 'Firedragon'.

I cannot remember exactly when my first guardian dragon arrived because it feels as if he has been with me forever. Perhaps I began to acknowledge him once my witchcraft journey began. He is a fire dragon, and he is enormous. When I feel him near, it is a presence looming behind me, literally towering above me, he can appear as several feet taller than me or the size of a house.

The size usually depends on how much I have messed up and exactly how irritated he is with my behaviour. His energy is powerful, incredibly so, and he steps in not only to chastise me, but also to offer support, guidance and protection. He has become a part of my energy and I would not want to be without him, even when he gets frustrated with me.

Other dragon energies have come and gone as and when I have needed them whether for spell work, in ritual or just to lend their particular support to whatever I am working on at the time. The interesting thing is that mostly the dragons are fully grown.

Rarely do I encounter a young dragon. Although on one particular occasion I was met by a new fresh-faced dragon. We had just finished a sabbat ritual in the centre of Stonehenge and were spending some time connecting with the energy of the stones when a small blue dragon appeared to me. He was very young and new to the world of humans. I had been experiencing a particularly bad time of things personally and I do believe he arrived to help me through it. Not to give advice or support because he was too young for that, but to provide a focus for me to care for him. He travelled with me for some time, until I was back on track.

Once I began to learn about witchcraft, working with dragon magic intensively became second nature. Your journey will be your own, and may well be very different from mine, but what it will be is a definite adventure.



MY DRAGON STORY

Dragon Magic

The Dragon is the principle of clear seeing: the ability to see things in a new light as they really are, beyond all illusions. And I do not believe there can be any doubt about the strength of a dragon from physical, mental to spiritual.

You might be familiar with the idea of a dragon hording his treasure; it is that treasure that symbolises the wisdom it keeps. For us to find the knowledge it guards we must quest for it within ourselves and venture into the unknown to find the answers. If you have ever practiced yoga, you will know the dragon as the Kundalini, the force that is hidden inside us. We all have it within us to awaken the forces within the dragon.

The World of Dragon has so many different breeds, types, colours, sizes and shapes. Some you may be more familiar with than others – the Chinese or the Welsh Dragon for instance, others such as the Wyrmling may be new to you. But no matter what they look like, they all hold incredible power. A dragon can be a strong, useful and wise guide or guardian and we can also tap into dragon energy to use within our rituals and our magic.

Dragons are a primeval force, they are physical and

spiritual, they bring with them the full force and power of the elements. They are also very wise and intelligent. Dragon Energy is one of the most powerful energies I know of and when blended together via the four main elements, creates the etheric dragon... a superpower.

Dragon energy is linear, so be careful what you ask for. You will receive it in the most direct way possible. Be very specific about your intentions, integrity and intelligence. Dragons do not necessarily use human logic, if you offer them a problem they will find a solution, but it will be a straightforward one, removing anything in its path to solve it. Dragon magic often works quickly and can sometimes have unexpected results. Dragon energy is very good at removing dark energy, it is good for clearing negative energy but make sure you also ask for positive energy to be left in its place.

Start your Journey

Whilst I do not want to put you off working with dragons, I would ask you to remember that these are very old and very wise creatures they have a tendency to get bored easily and can be impatient. Always treat them with the respect

that you would a wise elder. It will take time and effort to build a relationship with dragons and a lot of practice to understand their magic. You cannot force a dragon to come to you, you cannot make one work for you. If a dragon feels you are worthy and can be trusted, then and only then will they even consider making a first introduction.

Begin by researching and reading as much as you can about dragons, their myths, stories, folklore and legends. Then think about why you want to work with them, what are your reasons and whether you are prepared to put the work and effort in to follow this through properly. Dragon magic is not a quick fix and working with dragons is not something to be taken lightly. I would say only you can decide whether you are ready or prepared to work with dragons but usually they are the ones that make the decision for you.

What I can tell you is that working with dragon energy can be very beneficial and a wonderful experience. Dragons also have so much to teach us, all that ancient wisdom waiting to be shared with us not to mention all their powerful energy and support they can provide us with.

Rachel Patterson is the author *Dragon Magic*, as well as many other best-selling titles.

She Who Writes

BY ROBIN HERNE

Like most peoples, the Ancient Egyptians loved to give their deities titles and honours. The goddess Seshet was known as Nebet Per Medjat, Lady of the Library, and Safekh Abui, She Who Wears Horns. Her name translates as 'She Who Writes'. Described as the consort, or in some versions, daughter, of the ibis-headed Tehuti (whom the Greeks called Thoth), she shares the guardianship of scribes and writers with the Ibis God. Between them they produced the child Hornub, a manifestation of Heru or Horus.

Seshet guards the celestial Per Ankh, the Egyptian term for a library literally translating as the House of Life, and all earthly libraries. The Greek philosopher Hecateus describes a visit to a sacred library which bears a plaque declaring "the place of

how much gold, rubies, diamonds and so forth were filling their treasuries, some of this accounting was also preparatory to the distribution of wealth to those warriors, generals, and so forth who had helped to acquire it. Rulers kept their thrones in no small part through acts of largesse and giving each their due.

She is depicted in human form, lacking the animal-head of most other Egyptian deities, and normally wearing the leopard skin cloak of a funerary priestess. This is reminiscent of her role in deciding when to sever the thread of life. She records the names and deeds of the blessed dead, the Akhu, upon the leaves of the Tree of Life (usually thought to be a persea tree, a genus that forms part of the laurel family). One beautifully poetic funeral text has her saying, "My hand writes the

In some respects, writing is a form of necromancy, enabling us to commune with the dead.

the cure of the soul" (in some translations this reads Hospital of the Soul). This collection of scrolls was of particularly sacred texts, emanating wisdom for the benefit of the reader. Many, this author included, can testify to the therapeutic powers of being among books. Whether the curative power came from the actual content of the scrolls, or simply from being in their presence, is unclear. Seshet also watches over those who write the books that fill library shelves. Like a divine version of the famed academic Hypatia of Alexandria, she is also the goddess of mathematicians, accountants, astronomers, architects, and horologists ~ the latter because it is she who measures the passage of time. Rather like the Moirai of Greece, she also paced out the length of the pharaoh's reign. Accountancy may not seem the first career path to spring to mind when contemplating the mystical, but part of Seshet's function was to take account of spoils of war. Whilst undoubtedly pharaohs wished to know just

length of his reign as it comes out from the mouth of Ra. My pen is Eternity, my ink is Forever."

As a goddess of builders and architects, she was invoked at the start of any temple building project with a ritual known as Pedjeshes (Stretching the Cord). In this ceremony the Pharaoh would symbolically start the work by using a plumb line to take measurements ~ not unlike the habit of calling in modern day dignitaries to either lay the first brick or dig the first shovel-full of soil for the benefit of the journalists. Kate Spence refers to the goddess' role in correctly aligning new buildings through the use of the cord. This may have aligned the building with other significant landmarks, with stellar patterns, or possibly with energetic forces in the land itself (what these days is likely to be labelled ley lines). This may have been quite similar to the way Feng Shui is used in some East Asian countries to harmonise new buildings with the unseen forces.

This would be consistent with the broader philosophical notion of ma'at and the wish to work in a harmonious fashion rather than just depositing buildings anywhere that was available. As a goddess of mathematics, She would doubtless sympathise with Pythagoras' view that number is proportion which in turn leads to harmony. Maybe the alignment was a combination of many factors.

To understand the significance of her role, one must pause and try to visualise the Black Land as it was seven thousand years ago. Back then nobody could read or write. There were no newspapers, e-mails, texts, Facebook pages, novels, nor any other means of mass communication. For an idea to be transmitted, it had to be done orally. An idea could be transmitted only to those people who could hear it. The limits of memory defined the limits of history and knowledge for most of the population. The invention of writing, which the Egyptians attributed to Seshet (though it was Tehuti who actually passed it on to humanity in a manner reminiscent of Prometheus bringing fire to mortals), enabled a tiny number of people to expand the potential of memory almost without limit. The word hieroglyph comes from the Greek, meaning sacred writing. In the Egyptians' own language, they were called medu netjer, words of the God. The spoken word was the basis of Egyptian magic, heka, and so Seshet may be considered a deity who made possible the wedja (written amulet magic) so beloved of both ancient and modern pagans.

The creation of the written word revolutionised society. Writing means that not only can we access more information than most of us are capable of remembering, but that the potential for communication flowers. The capacity to write, no matter in which language, enables a person to transmit their ideas across vast distances and centuries to potentially enormous numbers of people whom they could never physically meet. In some respects, writing is a form of necromancy, enabling us to commune with the dead and discern their thoughts. These odd little symbols we call letters enable me to live beyond the grave, to become the shade that future necromancers consult. To be remembered, whether for good or ill, is to attain a form of immortality. As Seshet

might say these days, my laptop is indeed Eternity and my ink-cartridge is Forever. Seshet's capacity to record is also her capacity to preserve. The challenge of translating the hieroglyphs reminds us of a barrier or challenge within this form of magic – that all languages are filled with nuance which is so often lost when the last speaker dies and can no longer explain the subtleties, contexts, and allusions familiar to the native speakers. When one considers the profoundly magical nature of writing, it becomes all the sadder to consider what utter twaddle many people who put pen to paper, or finger to mobile phone, produce!

The hieroglyphic symbol of Seshet has posed something of a puzzle. Seen on the top of her head, a long vertical line leads to a circle from which radiate seven shorter lines or petal-like shapes ~ all of this contained under the umbrella of what looks like upturned horns. It is possibly a stellar allusion to a constellation with seven stars (such as the Peliades), though none of them form a circle the way the petals do, or to astrological concepts. Of course, the number seven has a great many resonances in cultures around the world, from musical scales to chakras. None of these are necessarily what the Egyptians would have had in mind. Egyptologists have yet to decipher the meaning of the symbol, though some have suggested it may be a papyrus plant ~ largely due to its use by scribes. However, the symbol for papyrus is already known, which suggests this means something else. One alternate theory is that the botanical design is actually either a lotus or a stylised cannabis leaf, this plant being used by the Egyptians both as a recreational drug, as a medicine, and for making various hemp products.

Those seeking to commune with Seshet might be advised to light seven candles and surround themselves with the texts they consider most sacred to them. Invocations could be written as they are spoken aloud, with the inscribed paper becoming part of the ritual offering.

Robin Herne is the author of *Pantheon: The Egyptians*.



When the Winds Change

BY SALLY WALKER

Picture this:

You're just your average bod living in late Tudor England (ah yes, sorry, that makes you one of the down-trodden peasant majority). Let's say it's the end of a wet summer in 1597 and the country's been suffering famine for three years now. Even in better times it was pretty tough going to scrape a meagre living, enough to keep you and yours in a modicum of health. After all, life has always been a precarious affair for the likes of you poor wretched rustics – subsisting below the poverty line, paying crippling rents, taxes and church tithes, losing grazing rights due to ongoing enclosure, bedbugs, unsanitary conditions, every day awaiting accident, bubonic plague, the pox or syphilis to strike you down before the sun sets! But now, what with yet another crap harvest and this infernal never-ending rain, starvation is hammering on the door of your wattle and daub hovel. Some of you, desperate to ease the gnawing hunger pains, even resort to eating acorns off the forest floor (subsequent bowel eruptions are going to make you regret that later).

Predictably – as ill done by as ever, malnourished and worrying your breeches off about the coming winter scarcity – you get sick. What can you do about it? Professional physicians are way too costly for your paltry purse, just buying a loaf of bread at the current extortionate food prices is outstripping the pathetic wage they pay you (kept pathetic by state legislation enforcing a low maximum wage for your sweat-and-tears physical labour). (At this tyrannical time in history, the mere mention of a minimum wage will get you laughed

out the tavern!)

So where does this leave you in your present extremis? Thankfully, not without a cunning plan up your sleeve. For hanging out almost on the doorstep, there are (and for time immemorial have been) the Cunning Folk. Offering an impressive range of services inclusive of herbal remedies, protective and curative spells, divination, midwifery, expelling witches' curses, finding mislaid items and so forth, plus a bonus give-away of some sage advice thrown in for good measure, all available at a bargain price or even just a bit of barter! Admittedly, although they dutifully adhere to the prescribed Christian worship, these practitioners in handy magic are frowned at by a disapproving Church, but the general peasant population simply adore them! They're the sixteenth century caring profession catering for the impoverished common masses. No self-respecting parish would be without its very own Wise Woman or Cunning Man!

True, some of their more peculiar ideas might seem a bit cranky and, as always, you'll spot the odd charlatan making a fast buck, but there may be something to these old country remedies and this tired-and-tested knowledge passed down the generations, whereas natural magic has long been esteemed and preserved in grimoires. The odd folk medicine recipe will even make it into pharmaceutical medication in time, e.g., digitalis or foxglove for treating heart conditions is attributed to one such traditional healer. And compared to the (tortuous) primitive practices of the Elizabethan medical men, with their over fondness of leeches and

single-minded diagnosing according to the four humours (considering your present bleak prospects, you'll fall under the melancholic category for sure), well quite frankly, you're be better off with the old Wise Woman down the lane...

Moving on a few hundred years, here we are with all the marvels of modern medicine, not a leech in sight, and medical treatment available for all and sundry, albeit with long NHS waiting lists. But something at grassroots level has been chipping away at the longstanding centralised and homogenous health care monopoly. For quite a few decades now (astrologers like to harp on about the comet Chiron, discovered in 1977, as the harbinger), we've seen the rise of complementary / alternative therapies. Largely provided by small scale independent workers advertising their reflexology, homeopathy, aromatherapy, herbalism, hot rocks – you name it – skills on a card in the window of the local health-food shop.

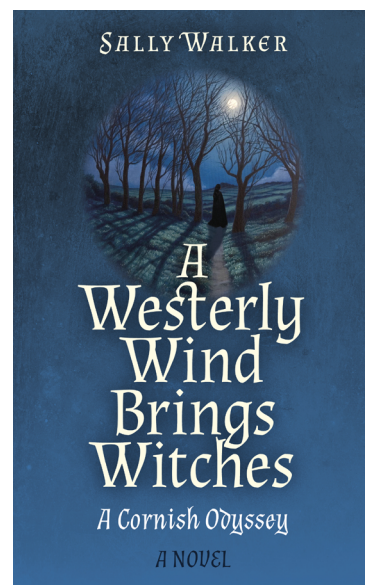
And simultaneously, there's been another change creeping in, quietly infiltrating the standard paradigm which has held such a strangle-hold on our view of reality. For truth be told, a lot of us have become a smidge disillusioned with this all-wrapped up, no-enchantment-allowed, transparent Clingfilm Era of consumables and top-down information drip. And even the denizen of science has turned traitor on its respectable Age of Reason's forebears. The classical you-know-where-you-are-with-Newton has been usurped by the raving mystics of Quantum Physics. Oh woe for the rational man! The universe is not what he thought. At its most fundamental spooky level it's neither predictable nor ordered, the observer affects the observed and some of the quaint convictions of the Cunning Folk don't seem so far off the mark after all!

Reality just isn't what it was. We've been plonked back in a Wonderland of mind stuff. The physical 3-D realism of the Enlightenment was just a big Sorcerer's trick played on us. We've looped another full circle of the Spiral and we're entering a Renaissance of the Magical (especially on Netflix), revisiting our ancestors'

supernatural mindset in a New Age of unrestricted sub-atomic particles in all their whacky, chaotic kookiness! And as ageless mystical practices such as divination, whether tarot or scrying, become more and more a part of popular culture, and as increasing numbers take to such modern trends as mindful manifesting, whether by neurolinguistic programming or an employment of spells, it's pretty clear by now that the sociocultural wind has changed direction. Because it's no longer just we pagans who welcome a return to magical thinking, slowly but surely blowing back to us on an old Tudor breeze.

*Wild winds whipping up
long gone feet dancing still
amongst the last stones standing.
A May breeze tangling
ribbons of missing memories,
tempting wives to whisper old tales,
peeping into a forgotten fogou
where a lost lore waits
to be reborn.*

(A Westerly Wind brings Witches, p. 223)



Sally Walker is the author of the novel
A Westerly Wind brings Witches.

Visit sallywalkerauthor.com

Fairies, Herbs, and Midsummer Magic

BY DANIELA SIMINA

"Known by the popular name of 'key flower', 'key herb', or 'fairy cups', cowslip, in combination with other herbs, is said to have the power to open the gates to the Otherworld...this is one of the flowers that fairies favor and which they bless in their passing on the eve of Midsummer."

Daniela Simina

Midsummer: the word conjures to mind hot nights, star-studded skies and crickets chirping in the grasses. It is the time when, according to beliefs still upheld in many cultures, fairies go around in procession. In their passing, fairies bless the fruits of the land and of people's labor. They bless wells and springs so water acquires healing and magical properties of various kinds. Fairies bless herbs that, gathered on the morning of Midsummer and according to specific rituals, become powerful ingredients to use in magic and herbal healing. Washing one's face with dew on the morning of Midsummer and walking barefooted on the dewy grass bestows health and beauty because dew too has received the magical, powerful touch of fairies.

This is a time for merriment and celebration. Lighting up bonfires on the night of Midsummer was once common practice throughout Europe. With the advancing of Christianity, Midsummer customs shifted their meanings and form of expression. From a celebration centered on fairies and various spirit-beings, Midsummer became primarily known as a holiday dedicated to St. John the Baptist. Practices associated with Midsummer were farther discouraged by the shift toward the pragmatism and materialism characteristic of modern societies. In some countries, Midsummer rituals, including lighting fires on Night of Midsummer, had largely fallen into disuse.

With the revival of paganism in its many forms, the almost forgotten practices are coming back. In many areas bonfires burn bright again on hilltops and crowds gather around to make merry in celebration of Midsummer. People enjoy food, music and dancing while fairies, visibly or invisibly, mingle with the partying crowds. Fairy beliefs which thinned out significantly but never died out entirely, are regaining strength and

permeate the holiday.

Around Midsummer, and particularly on Midsummer Eve, fairies act not only leniently but explicitly benevolent toward humans. Human-fairy chance encounters, much feared on any other occasion, yield to positive outcomes on this night assuming the humans involved do not breach fairy etiquette. This involves leaving offerings of food and drink, no prying or getting into their spaces uninvited, and if put in the situation to interact directly, politeness is key.

In Ireland, Midsummer has strong ties to fairies and to Áine who is acknowledged as both goddess and fairy queen. Áine's lore is very popular and the Irish may still refer to her as "the best-hearted woman who ever lived". Knock Áine, a hill nearby Lough Gur, in Co. Limerick is one of the places sacred to her. Here, as well as in other places associated with Áine, fires are lit on Midsummer in her honor. According to the lore, Midsummer is a time when the sí, Irish fairies, are very active. There are accounts of people having encountered members of the sí or Áine herself on Midsummer. Offerings are left out to invite the good will of Áine and her companions and as a sign of gratitude for the blessing of abundance and good health she bestowed in seasons past.

In many cultures, herbs previously sacred to fairies and deities came under the tutelage of various saints. Such is the case of *Hypericum perforatum* which since Christianization, is widely known as St. John's Wort. In Ireland *Hypericum p.* is called Lus na Maighdine Muire, Herb of Virgin Mary, and Lus Colaim Chile, Herb of (St.) Colmcille. In Germany, *Hypericum p.* is called Johanniskraut, its name clearly referencing Johan, the German for John. Worth noting that, Johanniskraut replaced the much older Germanic name for *Hypericum p.*, Elfenblut, Elves' Herb.

In Romania, neither the holiday's official name nor the name for *Hypericum p.* changed to reflect the association with St. John. The plant is called Sunătoare, a name that is related to the Romanian word for sun. This is very much in line with the nature of the fairy protagonists of this holiday. Sânziana, once a powerful solar deity, has been assimilated into Christian lore as Queen of All Fairies. In the Church's calendar, the midsummer holiday is named after Sânziana and her retinue of fairies, the Sânziene. The name is ancient, as it is the celebration itself, and while the mass said on June 24 is about Saint John the Baptist, celebrating Midsummer is centered on fairies and includes many traditions related to them.

the eponymous fairies and their queen. *Gallium v.* is also called Drăgaică, an alternative name used for both fairies and the Midsummer holiday. The name Drăgaică derives from the root word drag-meaning affection, love. This makes perfect sense considering that love affairs between mortals and love magic are the purview of Sânziene, the powerful fairies.

In Romania, love magic and divination regarding marriage are done on the Eve of Midsummer. Early on the morning of June 23, young women and girls go out to gather Sânziene (flowers). They make garlands and wreaths to wear throughout the day and while dancing or

Lighting up bonfires on the night of Midsummer was once common practice throughout Europe.

Across Europe where St. John's Wort is widespread, the plant is harvested mainly during the week following Midsummer. This is a timeframe when the plant reaches maturation and the chemical compounds that confer its famous healing properties are in optimal balance. In folk tradition, the day following Midsummer Eve is considered the best moment for harvesting because all herbs reached maximum potency due to fairies blessing them the night before.

In many parts of Europe, St John's Wort is held in high esteem by healthcare practitioners and it is one of the most frequently prescribed herbal remedies. Used magically, in ritual or simply stored inside the house, St. John's Wort keeps at bay malevolent spirits and fends off fairy attacks while in the same time propitiates the presence of the goodly inclined fae and spirit allies.

In many folk traditions, Lady's Bedstraw, *Gallium verum*, is known for its associations to fairies, and Midsummer. Lady's Bedstraw sprouts in May and begins to flower toward the middle of summer. Like many other herbs, *Gallium v.* is harvested on or around midsummer when, according to beliefs, its powers peak due to blessing from the fae.

Biddy Early, the most famous Irish fairy doctor, prescribed Lady's Bedstraw on at least two occasions to cure fairy-induced illnesses. (Lenihan, 1982) In Scandinavian lore, Lady's Bedstraw is known as Frigg's grass and it was used both magically and medicinally during childbirth.

In Romania, Lady's Bedstraw is most popular under the name Sânziene. The plant is sacred to

participating in games that honor the Sânziene and their queen. During the Night of Sânziene, the Romanian name for Midsummer Night, the erotic vibe runs high. Sânziene (the fairies) can charm people into passionately falling in love with each other. If upset or somehow disrespected, the fairies can make passion escalate into violent frenzy with tragic consequences.

While many of us would probably love to join crowds celebrating Midsummer around bonfires, on hilltops or in places renowned for their fairy associations, not everyone has the possibility to actually do so. This should not take the joy out of the holiday, because the magic of Midsummer is all-pervasive and fairies live everywhere, in the city well as in the wild. Fire is an important element of this celebration, but in the absence a bonfire, a small fire pit, a fireproof bowl filled with chips of fragrant wood, or an array of candles work equally well. Offerings for fairy peoples can be simple, like a cup of fresh water and/or a piece of fruit that is in the season. You may, of course, go about your offerings as elaborately as you wish, but remember that what really matters is the spirit, the belief and the intent. Something simple that comes from the heart worth more than an elaborate ceremony done by the rote with no feeling to it. Whatever you do, do it wholeheartedly and have a fabulous time doing it.

Wishing everyone a happy and magical Midsummer.

Daniella Simina is the author of *Where Fairies Meet*, *A Fairy Path* and *Fairy Herbs for Fairy Magic*.

Real Magic and Magical Fiction

BY LUCYA STARZA

Imagine a glorious summer by the coast, spending days with friends exploring secret coves, clifftop parties on warm evenings, and shoreline magic to make your deepest wish come true... When I've talked to witchy friends about the plot of my Gothic novel *Erosion*, they've nodded and said that's the kind of thing they'd do too. Being a real-life magical practitioner helps when writing magical fiction.

"Write what you know," is the advice often given to new authors. That's what prompted me to write my books in the Pagan Portals series including *Candle Magic*, *Scrying*, and *Poppets and Magical Dolls*. I've been a witch for decades and grew up in a family where folk magic practices were a part of normal life.



Despite years of doing candle magic, when I wrote my Pagan Portals title on the topic, I still did research. I delved into history, checked lists of correspondences, and looked at what's done in many traditions. Factual accuracy is vital in non-fiction, as well as testing exercises and spells to ensure they make sense.

However, I think most intuitive witches develop a sense for magical potential around them. They might pick up a stone or shell and know it's lucky, or feel it could be used in a certain way to change the future. When writing fiction, I have more scope to explore that kind of intuition, and use it for dramatic as well as magical potential. Here's an abridged excerpt from *Erosion*, as an example:

"Charlie said that to do magic you need to make a circle and focus on what you really want. You can use a solid object and focus on that. A candle, or a wishbone or something. Then you let it go. You burn the candle or break the bone. You have to let it go, Charlie said, so it can come back true. That's why you find broken things like swords left in lakes by people back in history. They were making wishes, making offerings to the spirits of the waters so their wish could come back true."

So we made magic on the beach and thought of our wishes, our dreams, with the salt drying on our naked bodies under the sun with just the gulls as witnesses. We found washed up driftwood and drew a circle around us in the sand, held hands and danced until we were warm and tingling and out of breath. We chose pebbles and held them, pictured the thing we wanted to wish for, imagining it as real.

"What do we do now?" asked Jo, staring at her piece of white chalk like an egg. I looked at mine. It was dark grey, a hard, flattish, smooth oval.

"Let's throw our stones into the sea," Zoe suggested.

We ran down to the edge of the incoming tide and got ready to throw our little pebbles.

"I wish the world was a fairer place!" Jo hurled her ovoid chalk. It splashed and disappeared into a swell.

"I don't think you're supposed to say it out loud," said Zoe. "You have to keep it

secret when you make a wish."

The wave broke and I tried to spot the stone in the backwash, but it was gone. Zoe threw hers but said nothing and it was also lost to the sea.

"Is this how it works?" I turned to Zoe, disappointed. Why wasn't there a flash of light or a sparkle of glitter. How was this magic and not just chucking stones?

But, of course, magic in the real world wouldn't be glitter and sparkles and flashes of light. It would be something so like things normally happen that you wouldn't suspect it was magic unless you'd cast a spell. And, as it was a secret, no one but you would know.

"I think so," Zoe said.

I thought for a moment, deciding on my secret before letting go and skimming my stone. It bounced across the water, once, twice...on the third time it went in and was lost.

Zoe smiled. "Three's a lucky number!"

But it wasn't three, was it? And the stone wasn't broken. And a stone wasn't precious like an ancient sword. Real magic isn't glitter and sparkles: it's sacrifice. That's why the ancient swords were broken. I wondered what I'd have to do, let go of, to make my wish really come back true.

As well as her debut novel, *Erosion*, **Lucya Starza** has written a number of other books including *Candle Magic*, *Scrying* and *Rounding the Wheel of the Year*.



A romantic couple is shown in silhouette, embracing and dancing. They are positioned in the center of the frame, with the man on the right and the woman on the left. Behind them is a large, bright, glowing sun that fills the upper half of the image. The background is a fiery, orange-red landscape that appears to be a desert or a volcanic plain, with some dark, jagged rock formations in the foreground. The overall mood is passionate and intense.

CONSCIOUSNESS

THE DANCE OF SUN AND SOUL

BY DOROTHY ABRAMS

Awareness. The one watching me be me. Inspiration. Assessment. Encouragement. I've been asking people what they think consciousness is, and those sum up their shared knowledge. Seems too little doesn't it? Isn't consciousness a big idea full of heat and light and creative destruction like the sun shining in the darkness? I think it is. Consciousness is the sun of our enlightenment. If we fly too close too soon the wax in our wings melts and we tumble back to our beginnings. But that is no reason to stay stuck in the mud. Enlightenment, like wisdom, is the principle thing. We are urged to get it with all our getting, People. Break out of the boxes civilization creates. Be a seeker of the sun this Solstice.

There are many tricky doorways for seekers to choose from. Maybe one in ten truly frees the soul to soar. The rest are riddles laughing at our innocence. Who are you to think you might approach the Sun? That is exactly the point. I am one wanting to find the solar consciousness and be one with its grand beneficence. I am one wanting to be a light being in my soul and merge as one in my future across the veil that marks this dimension a separate space. I am less welcoming of the apparent harshness and danger of the sun; yet I know it is all one sensibility. Full Sun, Dark sun.

The sun, you understand, is a metaphor here. The ecstasy of consciousness is abstract in earth bound minds. We don't quite understand its other levels beyond awareness. We might be suspicious of their levels of ecstasy: Joy. Magic. Love. Fusion. They are familiar words. Are they familiar experiences, ones as big as the sun? Are they

planets with moons orbiting them, reflecting the light back on us? Are they lush. Are they barren? Do they turn our minds inside out so we can see through the illusions of Terra into infinity? That is where we wish we were. Resting in the infinite energy of consciousness that outlives the Sun. Who can imagine that?

We won't reach the inside of consciousness without love, joy, fusion, or magic. We can't walk into a room and call consciousness over for a drink and chat about nirvana and how to reach it. Nothing lets us serve up chicken wings to a vision or offer pretzels for sainthood. Can't do any of that. Reaching a higher human consciousness requires blinding self-honesty. We journey to a place where we stop being posers, stop using cliches and pretending we know what we are talking about. Dancing across levels of consciousness, incrementally or in great leaps, changes who we are. The dance alters identity until it is a whispered secret we share at great risk of being thought mad or ridiculous. I Am.

The thought of fusing ourselves into a greater consciousness with the Unknown requires courageous openness. We risk intimate contact with the earth, stars, and sun. We meet them as separate from us but equally conscious with us because we are made of the star stuff they are. The sun is still hot boiling roiling star stuff at 10,000 degrees with its corona hotter than its surface at 3 million. The earth is partly cooled with a molten core, still star stuff. Flung across the universe in an ecstatic explosion, all the pieces settle into discrete bits without remembering who they are.

Their separation is a grand illusion given credence because we are too close to ourselves to observe the connections between cells which appear as galaxies. We think the truth is clear and open. Like discrete galaxies. We imagine We Are.

The problem with that is nothing is separate. We are conscious bits of one entity. We are single. We are the single love, the only ecstasy, the core of all magic, the One. Our discovery, my discovery reveals that the union of All-That-Is is me. Your discovery is the same. You discover you. I discover me. Finally, our affinity dawns in us. You are the one in my mirror!

Faced with the possibility of fusion among parts, the logical mind shakes itself like a wet dog emerging from the river to begin drying off. This fusion stuff is too fluid. It lacks awards for achievement, recognition for the struggle against great odds. Why if it were true we are closer than brothers or sisters, more intimate than lovers, what would be the point of... of ...of anything? Why could we not simply sit around and stare at each other's navels and say Oh My...that one's cute? And in that contemplation find wholeness and satisfaction in stasis.

One possible reason stasis fails is that image of consciousness is flat. It is incomplete. Immovable. It is made of rose-colored spectacles that ignore the soft miserable underbelly of experience. Honestly part of consciousness is pain. Oh I know vast amounts of fine higher consciousness thinking is dedicated to not feeling pain. This strain of the enlightened teaches submersion into God's Will, resurrects the tortured soul into eternal reward in exchange for broken hearts and tattered lives. Another encourages us to seek balance apart from desire so we don't mind meditating in the cold and generate warmth from the fervor of elevated vibrations. Sometimes we say in resignation that the poor and suffering always exist, which is fine unless you inhabit the life of the poor and suffering. Other times we give sage pronouncements about Karma which boil down to Hey! You earned it bro. Still others sound like my mother: we get the bitter with better, in response to my wail of why me????

Actually, misery balances or rounds out joy. Hate lives across a thin line from love. Magic opposes resignation and helplessness. Brokenness of the sharp shards of Kristallnacht defies fusion. The wholeness of Consciousness requires awareness of imperfection or else it makes no sense. Did the Moon welcome its tearing from our collision with planet Theia and capture by the Earth? Did the great Continent of Pangea rip its plates apart and sail in multiple directions as a mindless adventure? Did the ice ages descend without death

and extinction? Did Rome fold its empire without regret? Of course not. If the physical landscape is unfeeling, and I don't for a minute think it is, the creatures caught up in cataclysm were terrified. Death and oblivion appear permanent. We could call these opposites light and dark or some other pairing. Such names ignore that they are extended degrees in an overarching continuum of the same thing. Misery turns to joy, hate to love, shattered bits into a reunited whole, helplessness into magic. We need the dark night of the soul if we are to move from multitudes to One. We need the dark sun. It is part of us.

The Egyptians fill out the pieces of the dark sun metaphor. They imagined the Sun God Ra sailed in a barge across the sky from dawn to dusk, through waxing light to high noon through waning light and dusk, and then down into the underworld where He sailed a different barque through the darkness, defeated a mighty serpent, and emerged in his original boat at the new dawn. That sun in the underworld is the dark sun. Did it light up the Duat? I don't know. Did the Egyptians really believe this or was it a story to explain observable events? I don't know that either. I do know we need the night. We need rest and recovery. We need short days and dark long nights to generate seeds. We need shadows for romance and kiss and tickle. We need to stop our lives for a bit each day so we can pick up where we left off. The dark sun has high value. It completes the I Am.

An eclipse recently visited my part of the world. In the space of four minutes, we saw the cycle of the sun move from full on to total dark and back again. It reminded me of what night is and daybreak. The dark sun was beautiful. It wore jewels and flashed a diamond. Its corona was massive pulsing around the edges of the beloved moon. The experience was intimate, joyous and magical. The poet masquerading as a journalist known as David Muir said the sun merges with the moon as she covers him, and we are watching together, knowing all we have is each other. I was impressed. I think along with the poet this is why we have an eclipse. We see the ecstasy, participate in it and our souls touch each other so we can remember who we are and how we came to be. That is why we have science and logic, so we don't spin off in conjecture and get lost. And all of that means the same thing. I Am Consciousness. I am the Sun. I see the science of two celestial bodies connecting and the poetry of their sending a shadow to pierce my heart and draw me in so I Am becomes I See.

Dorothy Abrams is the author of *Identity and the Quartered Circle – Studies in Applied Wicca*

All Creatures Great & Small

The Magic & Lore of Insects

BY BRETT HOLLYHEAD

Witches inhabit various liminal spaces where spirits and humans intersect. It is here we undergo the process of initiation; we wield power and form sacred relationships away from the rigid and repressive norms of society. Yet there is a particular space within historical and folkloric accounts that is intrinsically tied to witchcraft but has often been overlooked or forgotten. This is the sacred union with the large assemblies of species that sustain the Earth and continue to fascinate our minds: the world of insects.

At first it may seem peculiar to associate witches with insects. However, the two have a lot in common. They operate in a similar manner and exhibit shared traits. These were strong enough to provoke Early Modern inquisitorial concern that connected the two together (Weiss, 1930). During the infamous and tragic witch trials, the concept of the familiar spirit gained popularity as belief orientated towards non-human interaction as the source of a witches powers (Wilby, 2005). The familiar was conceived as an autonomous demon who assisted the witch in their magical acts often in exchange for nourishment from the witches blood. These adopted a variety of corporeal guises such as the common cat or dog, but other forms included flies, bees and butterflies (Weiss, 1930).

Those who were connected to the use of harmful magic or Maleficium, were viewed as predatory and parasitic in the same manner as insects with witches acting out their enchantments upon the unsuspecting folk and draining them of their resources (Parish, 2019). Witches and insects lie at the heart of environmental instability with the witch held responsible for the destruction of livestock and crops,

infestation and the outbreak of disease through the form of lice, worms and locust. This was populated by the deeply embedded Christian culture of the 16th century whereby multiple biblical accounts reference the collapse of nature via creatures classed as vermin.

Although the connection was severed by advancements in science towards the end of the trials, the link between magic and insects prevailed in folk belief. Different types of insects were harnessed by both ordinary people and those more inclined to the supernatural. When we uncover this anthill of folk belief, we attain a newfound respect for the critters who have played such an important role in various charms and divinatory practices.

In many ways, we are beholden to the insects of our world.

As a folk Witch, my craft is inspired by the lore of my home within the Welsh Marches which holds quite a few critters in high regard. One of these include the cricket who was once believed to be the guise of the household spirit or fairy (Jackson, 1879). These ethereal spirits were referred to by different names such as Bwgan, Boogie, Bwbach and had the ability to bestow luck upon the household as well as cause mischief when upset or offended. Having a cricket in your home was considered extremely lucky with many folk making holes in their hearth or chimney for it to take refuge and keep itself warm. I can't help but wonder whether Jiminy Cricket was more than just Pinocchio's conscience but in fact a household spirit pulling the strings. But be warned, if the cricket left the house or was killed then bad luck or death

would fall upon those who dwelt within.

Ladybirds, otherwise known as Ladycows or Buwch goch gota, were also considered to be creatures of prosperity and fortune. These pretty beetles were formerly known as prophets of either love affairs or weather depending which area you come from and were actively used within divination (Burne, 1883). To find out where a future wedding would take place, the Ladybird was placed on the palm of the hand and the inquirer would recite:

**“Lady cow Lady cow, fly away flee
Tell me which way my weddings to be
Up hill or down hill or towards
the Brown Clee”**

After repeating these words, the beetle was thrown in the air with its flight observed. The direction it flew towards would be the direction of love and marriage. A variation of this chant existed for predicating the weather with the ladybird attempting at flight indicating fair weather. But if the ladybird fell to the ground, this would give poor weather.

Another insect that was renowned for its ability in magic, particularly surrounding healing charms, was the Woolly bear caterpillar. Unfortunately, these were not treated in a very humane manner, often being left to die to cure Whooping cough (Burne, 1883). The Woolly Bear was placed inside a hazelnut which in turn was placed inside a white cloth. This was then worn around the neck and as the caterpillar perished so to would the Whooping cough as part of the sympathetic transfer. If this didn't work the first time, attention would be turned towards the spider who would then fulfil the role of the healer within the nut. If you think this is bad, then please spare a thought for the poor snail who was either thrown over the shoulder to determine the initials of the future lover left over in its slime or was impaired upon hawthorn to cure warts (Owen, 2019).

Lastly who could forget the trusty bee who was treated as an auspicious omen and as an integral part of the family. Important

news such as a marriage or death was conveyed to the honey makers as part of a tradition known as telling the bees (Burne, 1883). Before a funeral, the first-born son would visit each hive and knock on them three times with a door key repeating:

**“Little bee, our lord is dead, leave
not while we are in distress”.**

The hive would then be covered in a black cloth and sometimes picked up and turned to face the keeper's door to initiate the mourning process. Failure to do so would forfeit the abundance they brought to the family. A famous example of this took place in 1961 at the funeral of Sam Rogers in Shropshire (Coole Lake, 1961). Sam was a committed beekeeper and on the day of his funeral, after the bees had been told of his passing, attendants witnessed swarms of bees flying from the direction of his home and landing upon the surrounding flowers and grave to give respect and say their goodbyes for one last time.

In many ways, we are beholden to the insects of our world. Regardless of whether you like them or not, they play a vital role in the ecosystem and in agricultural processes which are critical to our survival. Without them, life on Earth would be unrecognisable. Aside from this they also play an important role in magic and belief, frequently appearing in myths and lore as well as in multiple pieces of folk tradition. As witches our practice is based upon respect and relation to others and this extends to non-human being. So, the next time the thought of squishing or stomping on an insect crosses your mind, think of their influence on magic and their beautiful qualities they haven given to both our beliefs and everyday life.

Brett Holyhead, also known as the Witch of Salopia is a practicing Welsh Marches Folk Witch, workshop leader and a public speaker at regular Pagan related events/conferences throughout the United Kingdom.

#BeMoreGilbert

BY THEA PROTHERO

A few years ago, for my birthday I received a gilded 1890 edition of Gilbert White's "Natural History of Selborne". Originally published in 1790, it is a series of letters and a "Kalendar" detailing the phenology of Selborne- from birds and insect habits to plants and trees throughout the year. There are many illustrations of rare and unusual species which White documents in a scientific way. The book, which is considered to be the precursor of nature writing, is an exquisite time capsule of how the natural world was during the eighteenth century.

"Every natural fact is an emanation of divinity."

From reading this book, I was inspired to spend as much time in nature as possible and focus more deeply on mindful walking. In turn, this encouraged me to venture further into wilder and untouched places, which lead to writing my book *A Guide to Pilgrimage*, (published in October this year.) In my book I explore mindful walking in nature to a greater extent, and hopefully encourage readers to venture into places unknown, which will lead to a shifting and profound connection to the spiritual or divine.

**"The happiness and beauty of our fellow-creatures
should never be sport to us."**

Another legacy from Gilbert White's nature writing is my continued interest in ecology and studying his book emphasised the terrible loss of nature and wildlife in our modern world. It's a sobering thought that three out of five wild species mentioned in White's book are facing extinction and 15% of the rest are in serious decline. Today raw sewage is dumped into rivers, air pollutants in most parts of the UK exceed safe limits, and the planning laws around building in environmentally sensitive areas are being relaxed.

**"Objects of natural history are of more consequence
than they are generally considered."**

This, to me, makes every moment of time spent in nature more valuable and every observation of the natural world that much more precious. Whilst supporting environmental charities is an excellent way to give nature a voice and make your choices heard, leaving only footprints when spending time in the natural world is another way to help protect nature. Joining in litter picking and clearing of invasive species, organised by local environmental groups. Or by simply doing as Gilbert White suggests: "There is nothing sweeter in this sad world than the sound of the wild thrush's whistle." Becoming a witness to the fragility of our world, and reverencing what we see is something we all can easily do.

“There is no greater luxury than to read in the open air.”

For my last birthday I made a pilgrimage to visit Gilbert Whites House in Selborne which is preserved as a museum and offers a glimpse into his life. Surrounding the house is a large garden which is managed in traditional ways with original plants and large swaths of natural meadows encouraging wildlife. I spent a time relaxing on a bench next to the meadow reading his book. Upon returning to the house, I found a simple chalk board with encouraging ideas to #BeMoreGilbert which are excellent suggestions that I have reproduced here:

I will walk short journeys no matter the weather.

I Will spend time in nature every day.

Leave a bit of your garden wild.

In warm weather I will leave out a shallow dish of water for wildlife.

I will start a nature diary, write a poem, or do some art inspired by the natural world.

#BeMoreGilbert.



Thea Prothero is the author of the upcoming *A Guide to Pilgrimage*.



BY KELLE BANDEA

Our Brythonic ancestors seemed to have a thing for sacred springs, using them as places to petition for healing and to honor local spirits. These practices didn't die out with the advent of Christianity but rather became absorbed, with 'holy wells' being dedicated to various saints, many of which are thinly veiled Christianised versions of Celtic/Gaulish deities. Many scholars see an obvious continuation of the worship of local deities in the cults of various Catholic saints.

The Madron Well in Cornwall, also known as St. Madern's Well or St. Maddern's Well, has a rich and storied history that dates back many centuries and appears to be a good example of a Christianised pagan sacred site. Its origins are believed to be pre-Christian, with the well initially serving as a sacred site before the advent of Christianity in the British Isles.

According to local history, the well is named after St. Madern (or Madron), a 6th-century Celtic Christian saint who resided in the area. It is said that St. Madern was renowned for his healing abilities and that he used the waters of the well to cure ailments and provide comfort to the afflicted. The well subsequently became associated with his name and legacy.

However, there is so little information available about St. Madern that it has been

suggested by historians that he never existed at all. Others have suggested he was a hermit from Brittany who was born in Cornwall, but this seems odd, given that the site of the well is not where he lived and therefore he could hardly dispense cures from its water. It is perhaps more likely that he has been confused with a known female saint of a similar name, St Madryn.

While this Christianisation often served to obscure the pagan origins of many saints, it also inadvertently helped preserve their veneration, and many of the sites of once-pagan saints became Christian sites of both worship and prayer, particularly for healing.

Madron Well is certainly renowned for its healing properties. Pilgrims and visitors still come from far and wide to visit the waters, even though the well is now little more than a trickle, believing that they hold the power to cure a variety of ailments, both physical and spiritual. Historically, Madron used to supply water for the entire parish (also called Madron) in a tangible example of the Goddess' abundance.

The act of dipping oneself in the well's waters or tying offerings to nearby trees or bushes (often strips of fabrics known as 'cloodies' which are believed to rot as the pain or illness subside) was both a form

of devotion and a means of invoking the healing energies of the water.

Surrounding the well today are several trees adorned with colorful ribbons and cloth strips, showing that the cloodie tradition is alive and well and still an integral part of holy well veneration. Visitors still tie their offerings to the trees while making wishes or seeking blessings. This practice is reminiscent of similar contemporary traditions found at other sacred sites in the 'Celtic' world, from stone circles to sacred groves.

Just a little way up the path from the cloodie trees and the wellhead is a ruined chapel, a scheduled Ancient Monument believed to date as far back as the 12th century, dedicated to the elusive St Madern. Take a visit to it today and you're still likely to find homemade temporary altars set up there, consisting of flowers or other offerings, showing the site is very much still in use. On my own trips there, I find the chapel feels as powerful energetically as the well itself, and I am not surprised so many visitors are drawn there, whether pagan, Christian or anything else. In 1873 folklorist William Bottrell said this about the well;

Much has been written of the remarkable cures effected by its holy waters, and the intercession of St. Madron, or Motran; when it



LAST KEEPER BANDEA

THE LAST WELL-KEEPER

was so famous that the maimed, halt, and lame, made pilgrimages from distant parts to the heathy moor.

He also described how, on Wednesdays in May, children would be bathed in the well in order to cure them of skin diseases and minor ailments. Young people would drop pins and stones in the water, divining their future love affairs from the bubbles raised. It was from a local woman of Madron, who he describes as 'a highly reputed charmer' that Bottrell learned of An Katty.

For Madron was also the site of Britain's last living wellkeeper, An Katty. The tradition of well keeping has deep roots in British culture and history, just as the wells themselves have held a special place in the hearts and minds of local people and pilgrims for centuries.

Wellkeepers, often local individuals and typically women, were found at holy wells, helping to supply 'cures' and to pray for the sick. It was a tradition often frowned upon as pagan by local clergy, particularly after the Reformation, and as a superstition after the Enlightenment, but local legends suggest that at one time these custodians of the sacred waters were integral to the community and held a position of respect and responsibility.

For some, well keepers were seen as mediators between the earthly realm and the supernatural. They were thought to have a special connection to the saints or spirits associated with the well and could offer prayers, blessings, or guidance to those seeking solace, healing, or divine favor.

An Katty was the keeper when the well and chapel were still regularly visited as sites of healing cures, especially for eye problems, skin diseases in children and back pain. It was also associated with divination, and An Katty is believed to have told fortunes there, especially for young women who visited on May Day and Midsummer, wanting to know about their marriage prospects. She refused to take money, instead requesting payments of yarn or food. In keeping with the tradition of the well being used to help ailing children, she helped the women who came there with the ritual, telling Bottrell;

First she had the child stripped as naked as it was born; then it was plunged three times against the sun; next the creature was passed quickly nine times around the spring, going from east to west, or with the sun; the child was then dressed, rolled up in something warm, and laid to sleep near the water; if it slept, and plenty of bubbles rose in the well, it was a good sign. I asked if a prayer, charm or anything was spoken during the

operations? "Why, no, to be sure," my old friend replied, "don't 'e know any better, there musn't be a word spoken all the time they are near the water, it would spoil the spell; and a piece rented, not cut, from the child's clothes, or from that of anybody using the well must be left near it for good luck; ever so small a bit will do.

She also told Bottrell that she had no knowledge of any saint ever being associated with the well, that it was a 'Wishing Well' and the power came from there, not from the chapel. Needless to say, the local Anglican clergy disapproved of both her and the seasonal traditions, and after An Katty died, there was no-one to take her place.

Later on in the century, Methodists started to hold services at the ruined chapel, and the well itself was used less. But while the tradition of the well keeper may have died out, the animist impulse behind it may still offer us something for a time in which our relationship with the land has never been more strained.

Kelle BanDea has two upcoming Moon Books on *Modron* and *Mabon*. She has graduate degrees in Feminist Theology and Creative Writing and you can find more of her work at kellebandea@substack.com

The Energy of Magick

BY MARK NECAMP JR.

Whenever someone who isn't a witch, a pagan, or an occultist talks about energy I always chuckle a little to myself. Everyone has the potential to do magick. Whenever someone goes into a room that someone has had an argument in, or goes into a house that is purported to be haunted, or gets an odd feeling about someone, they are sensing energy. This magickal, or psychic energy, is the energy that all practitioners use to accomplish their tasks. This task can be anything from a change in consciousness, to achieve a goal in the physical realm, to connect with the Universe or the gods, or to catalyze events so that they may happen a little faster to the benefit of the practitioner in question.

Most practitioners will resort to spells and rituals to manipulate energy for their desired outcome, and I learned a long time ago that I can have just as effective results by manipulating magical energy directly. In magickal experimentation, I observed that I could potentially have the same effect on someone by doing long-distance energetic healing, using Reiki or a similar modality, as I would doing a candle magic spell for the same purpose. Sometimes the tools are just the medium of which the energy is directed and flows through or acts as a means to focus. That being said, I have noticed that when I do actually use tools in conjunction with my knowledge and skill of magickal energy, I have some remarkable effects.

My book, *Energy Magick*, is a primer in using magickal energy directly but it can also be used as a guide to be more aware of energy so that when combined with the practice that you have already cultivated—one may find that things flow better and achieve greater effectiveness. I usually measure such effectiveness by keeping track of practical results. I find looking at practical results as a gauge to how useful and effective my magical techniques are to be something that grounds me and keeps

me focused on this plane of existence. After all, the great alchemists of previous centuries certainly made sure that their work was as much of a science as an Art.

For me, energy is a universal language of magick; whether it is called qi or by martial artists in Eastern Asia, to the prana of tantric practitioners and yogis in India, or the mana of the practitioners in Polynesia. It is in the food we eat and the air we breathe; it is within us and outside of us; and is the major building block of creation Herself.

I feel that speaking directly about magickal energy and using that as a foundation to teach, learn, and communicate about magick is that we have more techniques and resources than ever before in human history, and I wonder how many times over the Library of Alexandria we have in content on the Internet alone.

Lastly, because there is so much out there and it can be difficult to separate what is real from what is not sometimes, I find using energy in magick in a direct and hands on way where you can literally feel the magick to be a great measuring device to feel, and sometimes see, what we are dealing with and gain confidence in our practice and ourselves.

Blessings.

Mark NeCamp, Jr. is a writer, poet, teacher, public speaker, entrepreneur, spiritual alchemist, and modern day student and practitioner of the Art. He is the author of the book *Energy Magick*, by Moon Books Publishing, and is the executive director of The Invisible College— a non-profit created to support the Pagan, Heathen, Witchcraft, and Occult communities through the creation of social, financial and educational resources.

He can be contacted through his website www.marknecampjr.com.

Fertility Deities and Rites

BY NESS BOSCH

If you live like me in the northern hemisphere, we are experiencing a solar revolution, of light and heat. Because hopefully where you live the sun will be a little hotter than it is here in Scotland! But even here, despite the rain, spring advances galloping towards the days of summer and in that race towards the solstice there is a word that every seed that wakes up to that heat that embraces us from the sky shouts: Fertility.

Because if we think about it, Beltane is a ritual where fertility is celebrated and it is no coincidence that it is the time of year when many people get married. In this transition from Spring to Summer, we can honor the fertility of Mother Earth, the mother goddess as the greatest exponent of that fertility and fertility, but of course, also other deities associated with the fertile energies of this time of year north of the equator.

Perhaps for me personally, when I think of fertile deities, Kibele comes to mind, and Demeter, also the Iberian Goddess Ataecina, but also Tanit-Astarte or Heqet. I also feel Oshun is extremely abundant, in a luscious way, very close to the energy of Hathor. We also have Epona or even Rosmerta who are also goddesses related to abundance. But I also think of Cernunnos, Dionysus is also lusciously abundant and intoxicating. Dumuzi, the shepherd god, also brings us the message of fertility and of course, we have Priapus, a god that we cannot ignore as a fertile god, with his prominent phallus. Nor can we forget Heracles as a symbol of masculinity and male fertility and I think the Bulgarian Horseman also came to honor there with a local pagan group when I visited last year.

Of course, there are other deities but

these are the ones I feel closest to at this time of year. Before these gods arose, our most ancient ancestors already buried their dead with seeds, in some way to transmit abundance and fertility to the other world, for their loved ones. It is ironic to find this symbol of abundance in a funeral rite, but beyond prehistory, we will see how that abundance in the afterlife becomes more and more important.

Menarche is also a celebration of the fertility of the bleeding woman who can now conceive and we find a large number of these rites in many societies. We continue to find references to these fertile rites in modern magical traditions. Fertility is not something that can go out of fashion, the fertility of the land that surrounds us, of its creatures is a matter of survival. Therefore let's continue celebrating! May the abundant gods bless us and may we enjoy the fruits of this devotional work and physical work, if you work the land, in the coming summer. Lets gather to honour the Sun as an abundant giver of life and lets dance to celebrate him.

Blessings.

Ness Bosch is a Shamaness, Priestess, Witch, Head of The Goddess Temple Alba and the Covenant of the Waters, and an independent researcher. She was the First Spanish Torchbearer of the Covenant of Hekate. She shares the Path of the Bones and her Shamanic Teachings Internationally.

Ness is the author of *Sacred Bones*, *Magic Bones - Stories from the Path of the Bones*

Utilising the Magic of the Summer Solstice

BY FRANCES BILLINGHURST

There is a somewhat magical time when the sun reaches its northern most point in the sky, regardless of what hemisphere we may reside in. This is the time of the summer solstice, a word dating back to at least the 1st century BCE when Roman naturalist, Pliny the Elder, noted that the sun appeared to “stand still” at its highest point on its westerly motion of rising and setting. In reality, the sun does this because of the Earth’s rotation, however, as Earth-orientated beings, we humans tend to view the cosmos from where we are as opposed to the other way around.

The eve of the summer solstice has long been considered a rather liminal space, being a time when the boundaries between the world of humankind and those of spirits is somewhat thin, and thus allowing for otherworldly beings to step through, often creating mischief, as in the case of Shakespeare’s famous play.

This time of the year the land tends to be full of its promised bounty, however, as any farmer or gardener knows, it can also be a rather perilous time as crops are exposed to disease. Therefore, there is a delicate balance between sunshine and rain to ensure a plentiful harvest which can be reflected in various folk traditions surviving today, where their origins come from a more agrarian time, and often from countries where the sun, at its best, tends to be weaker, the growing seasons shorter, and have an emphasis on fire.

From driving away evil spirits to protecting homes, livestock, and crops, smoke and ashes from summer solstice fires were believed to hold specific powers. People also purified themselves by leaping through the flames, which were also thought to bring about good fortune, secure positive marriages and even bring the couple an abundance of children.

Another fire themed tradition is the rolling of a flaming wheel down a hill and into a lake or river at the bottom. It is believed that the wheel symbolised the circle of the seasons, as well as that of the sun. If the fiery wheel rolled all the way down the hill, this would indicate a bountiful harvest would follow. If the wheel did not make its journey, the opposite would be the result.

Utilising similar fire festivities at the time of the

summer solstice can be found even in our modern world, however not where I live in the Southern Hemisphere, due to fire bans that tend to be in place from late spring through to early autumn. Instead of trying to force Northern Hemispheric pagan customs into Australia’s sunburnt land (much like trying to fit a square peg into a round hole), I tend to turn to the local indigenous peoples and the land itself as ways of finding a somewhat deeper and even more symbolic meaning to the season.

Around me there are many signs of great abundance as the delicious scent of roses fill the air and stone fruits ripen under the ever-increasing power of the sun. The cream and pink-red flowers of the blue gum (*Eucalyptus leucoxylon*) provide with an attractive show and a reminder that the local Kurna people of the Adelaide Plains refer to this tree as the kura (or honey tree) for it is an important source of nectar for birds.

Summer is known as Warltati here on the plains when Tirntu (the sun) is at its peak. However, the timing of the summer solstice takes place at the end of spring, Wirltuti (October to December), which is indicated by the position of the constellation known as the Southern Cross (in English) or Wirltu (the eagle, or the eagle’s foot) in the local indigenous language. Prior to colonisation, the Kurna peoples would be moving back to the coastal areas to take advantage of the cooling sea breeze when the temperatures increased.

South of where I live, where the mighty Murray River finally meets the coast after making its 2,500 kms journey from the Snowy Mountains in New South Wales, is the homeland of the Ngarrindjeri people of the Lower Murray River and Coorong. To them, the time between November and January is known as Luwadang (the time of warmth). This was when the Pleiades (Seven Sisters) and the “Stingray” (the Southern Cross) indicate that it is a good time to go fishing.

As the sun increases in strength, it continues to dry this great Southern Land where I live, allowing it to be haunted by the call of ravens. In many cultures around the world, the raven is associated with death, which seems appropriate here was the Goddess, the Queen of Summer, not only mirrors images of the Empress found in

many tarot decks but hints a shadowy realisation that she is the one who also wields the sacred scythe, and soon will be cutting down her beloved consort, the God.

This may appear somewhat unusual for Northern Hemisphere pagans, however in southern Australia, the God of Summer is not only a Solar God, representing the sun, but he takes on an additional role, that echoing the folkloric John Barleycorn, as Lord of the Grain,

more commonly associated with Lammas or Lughnasadh north of the equator. This connection can be found reflected within my surrounding landscape as it is around the time of the summer solstice that the grain harvest occurs here in South Australia. Echoing the belief of the "divine victim" where the king sacrifices his life in order to ensure the fertility of the land, so too does the Sun God sow the seeds of his own death as he awaits his time to be cut down by the scythe wielding Queen of Summer.

Utilising the Protective Power of the Sun

One way to utilise the protective power of the sun and fire at this time of the year that gets around fire bans, is to make a talisman. Such a talisman can be made on any day of the week, however, Sunday (being the day of the sun) tends to be more auspicious. For this, you will need the following items:

- * A piece of yellow or gold coloured paper,
- * A selection of herbs that are connected with the sun such as St John's Wort, marigold flowers and eyebright. While the amount you use is entirely up to you, my personal preference is to use multiples of three and a pinch or a teaspoon of each,
- * A small yellow or gold drawstring cloth bag, or a piece of similar coloured fabric that is secured with a piece of string or cord, and
- * A small yellow candle.

You will also need to find out what your astrological sun symbol is, or that of the person for whom you wish to make the talisman for.

Begin by cutting the paper into a circle. On one side draw your birth sign and write your name (or the sign and name of the person you are making the talisman for). On the other side draw the astrological symbol for the sun (a dot within a small circle).

Put the piece of paper and the herbs inside the small cloth bag. If you are using a piece of fabric, then place the talisman and herbs in the centre of the fabric and secure tightly with string or cord.

Pass the filled bag or herb-filled bundle carefully through the flame of the candle, while you are focusing on your desired outcome, saying:

*Beneath the bright and healing sun,
The spell's wound up, the charm is done.*

Leave the pouch beside the candle until the candle has burnt out (or allowing the candle to burn safely for at least an hour before extinguishing. The talisman is now ready to be kept on your person, or to be given to that special someone.

Frances Billingham is an author, initiated witch, magical practitioner and metaphysician who has been fascinated with mythology, folklore and esoteric sciences for over half her lifetime.

A Midsummer Shift

BY SCOTT IRVINE

It is easy to get fixed into a certain pattern with our pagan beliefs whatever path we are on. I call myself a druid but am also a witch that calls on ancient primal Mesopotamian and Hindu deities into my circle. We have all got an idea in our head on how the world works, her interaction with our star, driving nature and all biological life in a yearly cycle of seasons without fail, spring – summer – autumn – winter – spring.

Having a career as a gardener for the past thirty years, the last twenty working with the nature spirits all year round using the Celtic eightfold wheel of the year, Imbolc – Spring Equinox – Beltain – Summer Solstice – Lughnassadh – Autumn Equinox – Samhain – Winter Solstice – Imbolc. The four cross quarters, two extremities and two of balance represents midsummer, midspring, midwinter and midautumn where Imbolc is the start of spring, Beltain the beginning of summer, Lughnassadh the start of autumn and Samhain the beginning of winter.

It has worked very well with my pagan practice and gardening methods, understanding the workings of nature and her connection with Earth and Sky energies (the serpent and eagle) of which we (the lamb) are the conduit through which the two powers interact. However, I find having midsummer and midwinter at the solstices gives a false impression of maximum and minimum heat. We expect the temperatures to drop after the Earth's longest day and rise after its shortest but it does not. I understand that is due to the varying distances we are from the Sun and the Earth's tilt causing the closest distance at Lughnassadh at the beginning of August and it's furthest at Imbolc at the beginning of February. This would make these festivals the more likely to be midsummer and midwinter but how would this fit in with the elemental forces and the Gods and Goddesses involved by changing the seasons?

Mainstream weather forecasters recognise the start of spring at the spring equinox so it is here we begin our new perspective of a cycle around our star. Spring heralds in the awakening of new growth and fresh hopes. Spring equinox represents sunrise, new light and beginnings to a fresh new day/year. Many ancient cultures celebrated their new year at this time of equilibrium; Mesopotamia held great feasts at

Akitu, first or new year, celebrating the festival by sowing barley in honour of Lord Marduk. The Hindu New Year Ugadi honours Lord Brahma at the first new moon after the equinox when Gods were experienced first-hand by humans, learning from them and even sleeping with them.

The Mesopotamian spring Goddess was Inanna who descended to Earth to prepare the sleeping land for fertility and the coming of her beloved shepherd God Dumuzi. The New Year brings fresh growth, warming weather and longer days; the darkness has been defeated for the next half year.

Beltain becomes mid-spring, sitting half way between the end of winter and the start of summer. The Celts celebrated the sacred marriage and consummation of the Flower Maiden Briget and the Devine Son, Maponos. At Beltain, Briget is transformed into the Mother with a new focus on her unborn child. Beltain is the beginning of the Celtic Light-Half of the year.

Now is the Summer Solstice, the longest day and start of summer. The light and warmth of the Sun is driving nature towards maturity allowing folk more leisure time to enjoy the summer. Nature is alive and blossoming.

Lughnassadh is Midsummer, celebrated by the first harvest and the start of preparations for the coming darker and cooler weather. With Briget focusing more on her baby, Maponos quickly grew bored with family life, spending more and more time hunting in the forest. Deep in the forest, Maponos came across the beautiful Nature Goddess Grainne picking flowers. He fell in love with her and snatched her away to become his mistress.

Autumn Equinox starts at autumn signifying the end summer. Night overpowers day for the first time in six months. When the final fruit of nature's bounty is harvested and the land prepares for rest, Dumuzi returns to the underworld in the realm of Ereshkigal. All this came about when the young Sumerian Goddess of Love and War, Inanna wished to claim the underworld of her sister for herself so she could rule over all three worlds alongside the middle and upper worlds of people and Gods, she wanted their souls too. After passing the seven great gates separating the worlds of the living and dead, Inanna arrived at Ereshkigal's palace

naked, full of conviction and ready for battle. Coming face to face with her sister and seven Anunnaki judges, Inanna succumbed to their death stare, wrenching her heavenly powers and life force from her flesh and bones and her corpse hung on a meat hook in the kitchen. The spirit of spring was dead. Almost immediately, nature began to wither, leaves fell from trees and small creatures moved underground to sleep. The Sun God Utu diminished his light in condolence for his sister and the Earth began to grow cold with sadness. Unless something was done soon, the world and everything on her would die. It was left to the quick thinking wizard Enki, the God of Water to save the planet. Lord Enki created two golems with dirt from under his fingernails, armed them with the food and waters of life and sent them to the underworld to resurrect Inanna and bring her home. Before the Love Goddess could return, Ereshkigal demanded compensation for her loss, threatening to release the dead onto the realm of the living if she was not heard. The Anunnaki Council decreed Inanna could leave only by choosing another life to replace her. The balance of the universe must be kept at all costs. Unfortunately, for her beloved, Dumuzi was hosting a wild party when Inanna arrived home when he should have been mourning her. The Goddess had found her replacement and was not sad to watch him dragged away by two demon hounds that had accompanied her from below.

Unfortunately, the days still grew shorter, temperatures still dropped and leaves still fell from the trees. Nature could not live without the combined love of the masculine energy of the Shepherd (Shiva) and the feminine force of Fertility (Shakti). Lord Enki could do no more, already under investigation for his interference with universal law bringing Inanna back forcing the Sun God Utu to intervene in saving nature and humanity. Utu transformed Dumuzi into a serpent allowing Inanna's beloved to escape the underworld through the cracks in the earth to the surface, restoring nature to her blooming best. Pleased with himself, Utu brightened his radiance giving more light to the world. This made Ereshkigal more livid than before and

again threatened to release chaos into the land of the living. A balance needed to be maintained. After hard and lengthy negotiations between the Anunnaki High Council and the Dark Queen, a compromise was found. From spring to autumn, Dumuzi would live on the surface with Inanna, powering the land for life and growth and for the winter months would reside with Ereshkigal in the realm of the spirit.



Also at this time, in the Celtic world, the Stag Lord Cernunnos had become so jealous of the Devine Son carrying on with his beloved Lady Grainne, plotted to have him slain. During the Autumn Equinox wild hunt, Maponos was fatally gourd by the tusk of a boar. Briget was distraught causing the Stag Lord to regret his actions and left the forest to be the widow's consort through to her giving birth to the Devine Son.

Samhain becomes mid-autumn when the last of the leaves has left the trees and the veil between the visible and the hidden becomes passable. Briget ascended to the upperworld to prepare for the birth on the longest night. Cernunnos returned to the forest to be with Grainne for the winter. At this point of transformation towards the darkness, Samhain marks the end of summer and the beginning of winter. It was celebrated by the Celts as the beginning of their dark half of the year.

The start of winter then is the winter solstice on the shortest day with the threat of ice and snow, freezing winds and food source scarcity on the way. Briget gives birth to the Devine Son, the source of the Christ and symbolically the birth of Jesus.

Imbolc transforms winter into spring with the arrival of the Flower Maiden, Briget, a child of Mother Earth and virgin to ignite the spark to awaken the land from her sleep and awaiting the return of her beloved Maponos.

That works for me; I will give it a try, blessed start of summer.

Scott Irvine is the author of *Ishtar and Ereshkigal* and *The Magic of Serpents*

DANCING WITH THE NINE GREEK MUSES

BY ROBIN CORAK

Ask anyone if they've ever heard of the term "muse" and most will indicate recognition, perhaps associating the term with various writers, artists, musicians and other creative types. Rarely, however, do we hear about the nine sisters from whom the term came from. Yet, the muses-as a group and as individuals-were commonly referred to in Ancient Greece by both their collective name and their individual names. In fact, many ancient Greek writers, philosophers and artists sought out the Muses with the intent of receiving inspiration and approval for their works. Sometimes, the Muses gave freely. Other times, their suitors would find themselves in a fit of desperation, almost begging for their favor.

As an author, musician, and dancer, I have danced with the Muses on many occasions. At first, I did this without really knowing much about them. Like many, I saw them as one unit, with no need to understand their background or the individual gifts each had to give. At times, the muses would appear as someone I knew. Occasionally, I would be struck with a spark of inspiration so intense and so beautiful I was dumbfounded.

Yet, the muse (the unit) didn't always seem to be consistent and their silence could be daunting. If I was struck with writer's block, I

would longingly ask for their assistance. I read books by authors such as Elizabeth Gilbert on how best to court these sisters. It didn't dawn on me until much later into my writing career that the best way to develop a relationship with them was to start by getting to know them. As with any relationship, I needed to spend time with them and find ways to give of myself so that our relationship was not one sided.

The Greek Muses were said to be born in Pieria, Greece, at the foot of Mount Olympus. They were not always nine, however. In Greek regions such as Delphi and Sicily, it is believed that they started out as three. The Greek author Hesiod is known for having listed and named the nine sisters in his poem entitled "Theogony" which covers the origins of many Greek deities.

According to Hesiod, each sister had some specific talent or skill for which she was known (although these sometimes overlapped). Hesiod claims in his poem that the Nine Muses were the result of a coupling between the god Zeus and Mnemosyne, the Greek goddess of memory. Many Greek texts also point out a connection between Apollo and the Muses which makes sense given that Apollo was considered to be a god of both music and divination.

While their names and/or areas of speciality have changed from time to time, the original nine Muses listed in the "Theogony" are as follows:

**Calliope-Said by Hesiod to be "the chiefest of them all". Muse of heroic and epic poetry.*

**Clio-Muse of history and writing.*

**Erato-Muse of desire and love poetry.*

**Euterpe-Muse of music and bringer of joy.*

**Melpomene-Muse of tragedy.*

**Polymnia-Muse of sacred hymns and poetry.*

**Terpsichore-Muse of dance.*

**Thalia-Muse of comedies and plays.*

**Urania-Muse of astronomy and science.*

There are a number of ways to work effectively with the Muses. Writers such as Steven Pressfield and Elizabeth Gilbert have said that setting aside time each day for your creative pursuits will often attract the attention of the Muses. This advice makes sense to me as it would seem fitting that these goddesses of inspiration would find dedication to one's art to be appealing. Of course, this is not the only way to get their attention.

Below are some techniques that I have used with great success to get to know the Muses better and develop a deeper relationship with them.

- 1) **Spending time with each Muse.** In much of my deity worship, I will create an altar or shrine with a statue or some representation of that deity. Rather than spending a great deal of time trying to track down statuary which could often be expensive, I started simply. I created a Muse shrine which honors the Muses as a unit and individually.

In order to begin developing a relationship with each Muse, I set aside a different colored candle to represent each of the nine and would light the candle for the Muse I was working with that week. I might also add some items to symbolize their area of expertise. For example, if I was working with Terpsichore, I might put my belly dance cymbals on the shelf with her candle. For Euterpe, I would put a small figurine of a musical instrument.

I found that the best results came when I spent time with each muse in blocks of nine (ie nine days, nine weeks, nine months). Much of the time I just sat in silence, listening to whatever words of wisdom they had to share. I also spent this time reading Hesiod's "Theogony" as well as other sources to learn more about each Muse

- 2) **Providing creative offerings.** Many ancient Greek writers would invoke and bless the Muses prior to working on their craft. This is a great way to get their attention. To develop a deeper relationship with them, you might try applying some of your creativity to crafting an offering, be it a story, a poem, a song or a piece of art. This is bound to draw the Muses to you and provides a good foundation for developing a relationship with them.
 - 3) **Incorporate one or more of the Muses into your spiritual craft.** I call on Urania whenever I need help understanding or crafting something related to astronomy. Any spell work having to do with love or lust can be enhanced with the help of Erato. While all the muses are described as being joyful, Euterpe is noted specifically in some texts as being a bringer of joy. I work with Euterpe when I need to create more joy in my life.
 - 4) **Connect to their designation as water nymphs.** At least one version of the origin story for the Greek muses refers to them as water nymphs and asserts that they were born from the four sacred springs that flowed on Helicon. Given their association with water, you might try making a bath tea, anointing oil, or tea for drinking associated with each Muse. This can be done by researching herbs and oils that correspond with the energies of each Muse. For the muse of desire, I might use oils or plants such as roses and jasmine. Given Melpomene's association with tragedy, I would likely use herbs or oils associated with grief such as frankincense, cypress or geranium.
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Fortunately, I have found the Muses to be very appreciative of any creative initiatives we undertake in their name. I have also found them to be forgiving when or if the work we do in their name doesn't turn out as well as we expected. Let the Muses take you on a journey beyond the limits of your imagination and watch as they infuse your life with beauty. Frolic with them as they boost your sense of child-like wonder and help you indulge in free-spirited happiness. You will find that your life will be enriched by dancing with these magnificent goddesses.

A practicing pagan for 20 years, **Robin Corak** is a long-time member of the Sisterhood of Avalon where she currently serves as the Board Secretary. She has been published in a variety of anthologies and teaches locally and nationally at conferences including Paganicon, and Pantheacon. She is the author of *Persephone* and *Demeter*.

German Dragon Spirits

BY MOSS MATTHEY

In the lore of Central and Eastern Germany, a strange kind of household spirit often appears. This spirit goes by the name 'Drak' or Drache', meaning dragon, and pops up both in witch trial records and in later folklore. However, the Drache is a little different, and seems to straddle the line between household spirit and familiar. In my home area of Germany, the belief in the Drache proved quite enduring, being referenced as a living belief well into the 20th century. The Drache has endured for centuries and continues to fascinate down to today. But what does this spirit look like?

A Dragon by Any Other Name

It's tempting to imagine the Drache spirit appearing like the majestic dragons of medieval literature, soaring through the sky and breathing great gusts of fire. Unfortunately, that is not entirely accurate. While the Drache does have an association with fire, it is less likely to breathe it. Rather, it often appears as a ball of flames and smoke streaking through the sky. In fact, many supposed sightings of the Drache reported in trial records are thought to have been shooting stars, being characterized by a bright blazing streak through the heavens.

However, like the majestic dragons of lore, their fiery nature meant they weren't to be messed with. If appropriate offerings weren't made for their services, they were likely to burn down your home. Many folktales attribute fires breaking out to their wrath. However, this is where the similarities seem to end. As mentioned, rather than large scaly reptiles, the Drache most commonly appeared as a ball of fire and smoke. Beyond that, their appearance could vary. In addition, these spirits were quite small, in many folktales small enough to live in a kettle, and certainly small enough to enter a house through the chimney.

What the Drache Does

Why would someone want one of these spirits, given the risk of your house burning down if they were displeased? Well, the benefits definitely seemed to outweigh the risks. The Drache served their master by bringing them an abundance of money, food, and saleable goods. In fact, the most common reason to be accused of forming a pact with them was a sudden increase in wealth. Seems like a great deal, doesn't it? However, it's not quite as it seems. In order to gain this wealth, the Drache would steal from all their keepers' neighbours, enriching them at the expense of their community. The entire purpose of the Drache was to steal on their masters' behalf and bring the stolen goods down their chimney, like a kind of economically aggressive Santa.

It is this aspect of the Drache's lore that was the focus of the witch trials. Magical thievery at the expense of the community could not be tolerated, and great efforts

were taken to root it out. The complaints about dragons did not often come from above through some inquisition, however. If an individual was suddenly rich, and especially if they were miserly with their wealth, then accusations often came from within the community itself. Within the trial records, we find accusations levelled against those who refused to lend money to their family or lent out money with extortionate interest. Essentially, those with the means to aid their community but who refused to do so, or who used their wealth to take advantage of said community, were likely to find themselves accused of being a dragon witch.

Dragon Brides and Dragon Bridegrooms

Another common motif was the association between the Drache and demons or even the Devil himself. Martin Luther, a key figure in the protestant reformation, wrote of the Dragon brides and Dragon bridegrooms, condemning liaisons with these spirits. In so doing, he linked them to the idea of incubus and succubus demons. The idea of carnal relations with the Drache also appears in the trial records. Several accused witches confessed to sleeping with their Drache in the form of a man. However, this was very likely after significant torture.

Within the early modern period, any spirit that didn't exist in the Christian binary of good and evil was quickly labelled diabolical. The Drache is no exception. It is possible, even probable, that the Drache of the witch trails grew from earlier folk beliefs in dragon spirits. In Lithuania, there exists a belief in the žaltys, a house snake that brings good luck and must be honoured. Harming the žaltys is sure to bring misfortune. There are other traditions of revering serpents as household spirits that stretch back into European lore. However, these spirits lent themselves to being diabolised more so than most. In biblical lore, the Devil is described as both a dragon and a serpent. It is no surprise, then, that dragon or serpent spirits would be interpreted as demons.

The Drache Today

There are many ways to interpret this fascinating spirit for the modern day. One way I do this is by peeling back the layers of Christian bias to seek out an earlier belief in a household spirit I can incorporate into my own witchcraft. However, we also find in this lore a warning against profit-oriented economic behaviour, especially at the expense of the community. The Drache reminds us that we're all in this together, and that a rising tide lifts all ships. We do not need to take advantage of others to get ahead. In a world where that seems to be an increasingly radical idea, I think it is important to remember the Drache spirits and their lessons from time to time. Community is more important than wealth, and people more important than profits.

Moss Matthey is a Welsh-German folk witch, upcoming author with both Llewellyn Worldwide and Moon Books, a workshop host and public speaker.



BECOMING A BOG WITCH

BY MAB JONES

BY MAB JONES

When you think of dirt, do you imagine it here, near, as part of your environment, or even a part of yourself? Most likely, when you think of dirt, it's far and away: somewhere, or someone, else. Images of place linked to all manner of muck might float into your mind, from toilets and sewers to boglands and bits of waste ground. If there's dirt in a home, then you probably don't think of it in your home – that's elsewhere. If there's dirt on a person, you don't imagine it as on yourself; you imagine the dirty nails of an unkempt, uncared for child, or the unwashed torso of a down-and-out, pungent on the street or sweating like an old cheese in the hostel. You, you are 'in and up', rather than down-and-out, surely. And you are adult, not child, and therefore know the importance of handwashing, bathing, brushing; the daily ritual of toothbrush and floss. You keep your fingernails neat and clean – don't you? You change your underwear and apply deodorant as regularly as necessary. You are clean – and dirt is far and away – right?

But some people just don't feel this way. I never did. Dirt for me was always under my skin. I felt myself made from it. My relationship with my body was warped,

undoubtedly, and the reason for this was childhood sexual abuse. I had been dirtied, and I carried that dirt around, it seemed, feeling made of it. And, it wasn't the sort of dirt from which I felt anything might ever grow: it was filthy, infertile stuff; waste; refuse. Until the age of almost 30 I covered my body from head to toe, always wearing collars so I could hide my skin away. I could only ever loosen up under the influence of drink, with which I had an uneasy and sometimes dependent relationship.

At the same time, I yearned for something more, and was what you might call a spiritual seeker, belonging to various groups and attending different meditation, healing, and psychic development sessions. It was at the age of 30 that I experienced a big change – the first very marked energetic shift in this life – but still, although I stopped thinking I was made of dirt, body shame and dysmorphia proved hard to instantly shake away, and are still issues I am working to address now.

Beauty has been a great balm in my life, luckily. When I first encountered wetlands, they seemed incredibly beautiful, with near translucent golden heads of feather grass waving me into a green and lushly vegetated landscape. Blue pools of water glittered like

gorgeous eyes everywhere, and the myriad birds were like swooping, swimming jewels within the swathes of blue and green. But it was summer then. In other seasons – and particularly in Wales’s wet climate, with so many words for rain in Welsh that it’s something akin to ‘snow’ in the language of some colder terrains – the wetlands – of which Wales, with water on three of its sides, has many – look less appealing. At those times, they’re apt to be muddy and mulchy, mired in muck and with a brown or grey appearance. Slushy sludge and gulchy goo are the order of the day. Dirt, essentially.

Bog Witch draws a parallel between the body of earth we call wetlands and the body on Earth we call woman, therefore. My body, as mentioned, has always seemed a gloopy, floppy, gelatinous sort of thing, making its messes and entirely beyond my control. I’ve cut it and punched it, starved it and stuffed it, poisoned it with alcohol and refused to hear its cries. Wetlands, too, have been depleted and destroyed, their riches of flora and fauna treated as a disgusting, barely tolerable commodity; they are generally, in the modern day, under continuous threat from climate change or urban development, and as a poet I know of hardly any verses which take them as a subject, and only one which shows them in a positive light. They are the ‘bog of eternal stench’, à la the film *Labyrinth*, or ‘the swamp of sadness’, as per the movie *Neverending Story*, two favourites of my childhood. Whether it’s her or here, therefore – the female form or the mucky bog places – these fecund forms seem dirty, to us, and hold little cultural value as a result.

I wanted to show in *Bog Witch* both the beauty of the swamp and a parallel story of acceptance in which I grow to love my body. The personal and the profound, a deep sense of place and the prospect of transmuting our view of both Earth and self, intertwine in this work. Whilst not a witch per se, I point out some ways and means which might be developed by the more witchy amongst you into your own particular magic. Wetlands are a great ‘source-place’, full of life, lore, and vitality. The plants there may be mired in dirt, but they are generally fascinating, and of course it’s the dirt that makes them grow. I, too, began in dirt – a sense of myself

as dirty – but have grown towards the light. It is our nature to do so. Understanding the marvellous processes of wetlands, in their ecosystems as well as within their many benefits e.g. how they prevent flooding, minimise coastal erosion, and hold carbon (they are often referred to as the ‘kidneys of the earth’), has made me reflect on my own body and its marvellous mechanisms. It, too, has its preventative measures and means of keeping its own ecosystem in check. It is a machine of miracles, of interdependent processes that are, in their own way, magical.

The wetlands have acted as a kind of mirror, therefore, and I feel them as a deeply mystical place: a nebulous place, too, that’s not quite water, not quite land. There’s a special kind of atmosphere, here, as a result, and I would encourage you to consider the wetland as a place to inspire your next poems and songs, rituals and spells. *Bog Witch* features a number of poems inspired by its sometimes bare and bleak, yet always extraordinary, scenery, and when you walk its ways chants and tunes seem to spring at your lips. Speaking of chants, the book’s structure comes from that of the *Three Witches* in *Macbeth*, as I was interested to note that many of the animals mentioned in the first part of that piece are typical wetland creatures – frog, bat, newt, amongst others – and, whilst there is a theory that these terms are perhaps slang names for various herbs, the plants in that case may also potentially be found in British wetland areas. I explore the symbolism and folklore surrounding these animals in the book, and hope that these evocations, too, might inspire others’ creativity and imagination, as well as invocations and rituals which are wetland-based.

Thanks to the wetlands, I am grateful, now, for the dirt. I no longer see it as part of me, but without it at my root – my beginning in life – I never would have reached up towards the light. Perhaps, after saying I am not a witch for so long, and being afraid to be who I really am inside in a public way, I may even become a bog witch myself, who knows!

Mab Jones is the author of *Bog Witch*. Visit mabjones.co.uk

Exmoor Pine

BY ELEN SENTIER

The moor was still in its winter-pale-n-dark colours ... waiting, watching and breathing underneath the dead grass stems. The sun shone in the clear blue sky, but it was cold, cold. The winter lady, Ceridwen, still held us all in her hand and I was walking under her mountain, her stronghold, Dunkery Beacon.

Dunkery ... Dun Keri ... dun means stronghold in the old tongue and kery is a short-form of Ceridwen. It is her mountain but she shares it with the antlered god, Gwyn ap Nudd, and his red-eared, red-eyed hounds. Both of them are leaders and comforters of the dead. It was a good place to celebrate the end of winter.

And the goddess was wide awake as I walked. She showed herself in the blaze of gold on the hillsides around me ... I am the blaze on every hill, she told me through the glowing golden furze (we call gorse furze on Exmoor). This picture is of Dunkery Beacon standing tall to the right, with a carpet of furze stretching down the hill from me to her. It's one of my favourite places, the beginning of Dickie's Path where I was walking today.

Alone's not lonely and I was all alone, which is just how I love to be on the moor. Nothing to hear but the wind and the birds, and the occasional sounds of deer and ponies and cattle. At times, when I've stopped and am sat still, there's the squeak and rustle of a mouse or rabbit in the grass, or sometimes a hare siting up with ears tall among the heather and stamping a foot. The feel of the land under my boots is electric, it feeds me.

The path led me down to the stream and then up along the lower contours of the north side of Dunkery. Below, on the other side of the valley, deer grazed, taking advantage of the farmer's field. Needful too as the hinds will be dropping their fawns soon so they must feed up to have milk for the little ones. More sign of the goddess for me as I was brought up with the Deer Lady on this very moor.

I walked. My whole body felt alive as it does

nowhere else. Like I said, this moor feeds me body and soul.

Below me now, just a hundred yards away, was a grove of Scots pine where I've occasionally done an over-nighter. It's wonderful floating in the hammock amongst the pines, with the silver river of the Milky Way flowing above you in the sky and Gwyn in his star-form, as Orion the Hunter, standing guard on the riverbank. The deer come snuffling around, liquid eyes staring surprise at sharing their lying-up places with me. And the ponies and cattle, snorting at finding a human in their woods, come to investigate. I lie still, peeking over the edge of the hammock, watching and listening ... thrilled to bits to be amongst such company. There are tawny owls too, occasionally whole parliaments of them hooting and calling and discussing in the trees around me, but that only happens now and again. And, of course, other night-denzens like foxes and badgers come to wonder at the human ... remembering the long-ago times when we lived with them as hunter-gatherers.

I walked on, up the path. Suddenly there was a noise like an express train rushing up the valley behind me, big, scary, roaring, unnerving. I didn't realise what it was until it hit me. Literally. I was pushed, shoved, off the path by a great gust of wind, buffeted off the main path and onto a smaller one. Ooof! The gust roared on past me while I stood watching where it went and then I turned to see where it had put me. Ooof again!

He – or was it she? – stood alone on the edge of ridge above the stream-valley. A lone Scots pine. And the path led round to her, curving in a wide arc as many paths do when they take you somewhere special. I had to go visit with her.

She had dropped a big branch at her feet, just the right height for me to sit on. So I did. You cannot refuse offers of hospitality like that!

Sitting there, watching more deer grazing the field on the other side of the valley, I began to

hear the pine tree. It's not like ordinary hearing, more like watching in a way. The everyday world doesn't go away, if anything it becomes far more intensely real and present. The colours are more saturated, like in a painting, the breeze feels like silk on your skin, the scents of the land and the plants and the animals are distinct and individual and yet, at the same time, they blend together into the perfume of the land. You see the world as otherworld sees it, full of depth and meaning we too often miss with our normal eyes. For this isn't a normal state, not for most of us. It certainly wouldn't be safe to drive the car like this! It's the shaman's dream-state, flying-state, journeying state. You are here ... but here is a place you're normally not!

It's like that. For the shaman, for the awenydd as we call ourselves in Britain meaning spirit-keepers, you go by the way of dispossession, a way in which you are not, and only so do you arrive at where you – and the goddess – truly are. Ooof yet again! Deep and mysterious, requiring a lot of pondering, living-with, sitting-with. Pine tree brought me back to all of that, reminded me, re-minded me. I need that, as we all do, every now and then. It's all too easy to get caught up in the daily round of little things and so neglect the wholeness of everything. Pine tree brought me home again.

I needed that buffet of wind too ... like a kick up the arse! I was halfway there in my walk, in my joy of the land, but there was still too much me around! I wasn't fully engaging, not until I got shocked out of my socks and onto the path to the pine tree, not until I sat with pine tree and listened, watched, took myself out of the picture and went with her, unknowing.

Pine tree is about rebirth – breaking up land to make earth and soil to support growing things, and she does this for us too, breaking

up old habits so that new can grow ... this is rebirth. The cusp of time that is the end of winter and the beginning of spring is a very good time for doing this.

She's a Boreal Forest tree, like the birch, and used to be a big part of the woodlands in Britain, including on Exmoor some 8000 years ago. Nowadays only remnants of our original ancient forests remain but there's a long term

project to restore them that includes re-wilding, bringing back predators like lynx and wolf, helping the Scottish wildcat. And the return of the beavers who are already back in Scotland

and on the river Otter in Devon and making a huge and welcome difference to successful wood and water management. Red Squirrels are gradually coming back too along with ospreys, goshawks, kites and (hopefully) hen harriers. This is rebirth.

I was called back from my time with pine tree by the sound of ravens carking overhead, tumbling and playing, obviously a pair. Ravens lay eggs in February so they would usually have chicks in the nest now, in April, but this pair certainly weren't hunting. Perhaps they were a young pair, under three years old, bonding still and finding their own territory. I love them, ancient, ancient birds who mate for life. They like pine trees too. I continued my walk, thanking the pine tree for helping me celebrate the death of winter and the birth of spring.

Later, in bed that night, I remembered Bob Toben's book, *Space-Time and Beyond*, in which he says, "Death is just a change of cosmic address ..." Right on, Bob!

Elen Sentier was born on Dartmoor and grew up on Exmoor. She is the author of several Moon Books including *Elen of the Ways* and *The Celtic Chakras*.



Arianrhod (Silver Wheel)

BY ELLEN EVERT HOPMAN

Known as “The Silver Wheel that descends into the Sea” (The Moon), Arianrhod is a Welsh Sky Goddess whose dwelling is on the island of *Caer Sidi* (Revolving Castle). Her own fastness, *Caer Arianrhod*, is in the *Corona Borealis*, the crown of stars that circle around the North Star. The *Aurora Borealis* (the Milky Way) is the lights shining from her castle.

Caer Sidi is also called *Annwn*, the Otherworld, the Welsh Land of the Dead. She carries the dead back to her northern land in the sky, and once there, the dead wait for Arianrhod and her retinue to weigh their fate before they reincarnate. Arianrhod gathers up the souls of dead warriors who fall in battle, taking them to her ship, *Oar Wheel*, and transporting them to *Emania* (Moonland).

Her mother is *Don* the Celtic Mother Goddess (equivalent to *Danu*) and her father is *Beli Mawr* (Beli the Great). Her children are *Dylan* (a child of the sea) and *Lleu Llaw Gyffes* (a hero of light, equivalent to Irish *Lugh* and the Gaulish *Lugus*). But Arianrhod is a “Virgin” Goddess, meaning that she belongs only to herself.

As a Moon Goddess, honor her at the Full Moon. Owls are sacred to her and at times she shapeshifts into one. Owls, which are associated with death, are filled with wisdom, with eyes that can see into the depths of a person’s soul. Her sacred plants are Ivy and the Birch tree. Birch, the tree of new beginnings, is a symbol of her role in managing the reincarnation of souls. Because she weaves the fate of the dead, spiders are her sacred animals, as are wolves which are connected to the Moon in Celtic thought.

Silver jewelry, objects and coins would be a suitable offering to her, especially if thrown into the sea. Moonstones, pearls and white or clear quartz can be placed on the altar. Also, Lunar herbs such as Moonflower, White Lotus or Water Lilly, Evening Primrose, Jasmine, Moonwort, Milkweed, Passionflower, Mallow, Willow, Opium Poppy, Chickweed, Mugwort, White Rose and Iris can be placed on the altar or be worn as a crown or belt during her rites.

Ellen Evert Hopman is Archdruid Emerita of Tribe of the Oak (*Tuatha na Dara*) an international Druid Order, and the author of “*Celtic Druidry – Rituals, Techniques & Magical Practices*”, “*A Legacy of Druids – Conversations with Druid leaders of Britain, the USA and Canada, Past and Present*” (foreword by Philip Carr Gomm), the Druid trilogy of novels, and other volumes on Ogham, tree lore and Celtic Herbalism.

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*"Primary chief bard am I to Elphin,
And my original country is the region of the summer stars;
Idno and Heinin called me Merddin,
At length every king will call me Taliesin.
I was with my Lord in the highest sphere,
On the fall of Lucifer into the depth of hell
I have borne a banner before Alexander;
I know the names of the stars from north to south;
I have been on the galaxy at the throne of the Distributor;
I was in Canaan when Absalom was slain;
I conveyed the Divine Spirit to the level of the vale of Hebron;
I was in the court of Don before the birth of Gwdion.
I was instructor to Eli and Enoc;
I have been winged by the genius of the splendid crosier;
I have been loquacious prior to being gifted with speech;
I was at the place of the crucifixion of the merciful Son of God;
I have been three periods in the prison of Arianrod..."*

Taliesin, Welsh poet (c. 534 - c. 599)

Returning to Magic of Nature

BY LUKE EASTWOOD

Once could say that mankind has been gradually departing from the natural world, psychologically at least, after the Promethian gift of fire. Chimpanzees use simple tools like sticks but we have now reached the point of midwifing Artificial Intelligence and creating robots that are capable of doing things that would could barely dream of.

The Druids of old learned how to manipulate nature, to read it for signs and portents and to observe the stars and planets as a form of divination. Their world was one that was steeped in nature, their magic was based on the power of the Earth itself and the life force that resides within it and in all living things.

The original Druids did not have to contend with over-population, loss of natural habitat, pollution, huge sprawling cities and technologies that have the power to destroy the entire ecosystem. The last of Europe's Pagans were gone from Northern Europe around 1000CE, under immense pressure to convert, at least officially, and the Druids survived longest in Ireland and possibly parts of Scotland until perhaps around 800CE, when we see all traces of Pagan burial and worship disappear under the tide of Christianity.

So, today Neo-Druidism is not only legal and sage to practice, it is growing rapidly - no longer threatened by the Roman Church or by governments or armies. That is all very positive, but I would suggest that spirituality and humanity faces a very different existential threat in the form of our own ingenuity.

Various writers of the 20th century, such as Alvin Toffler, Buckminster Fuller, Karen Carson and Laurens Van Der Post have written about how our very cleverness threatens human society and the planet itself. Not everyone would agree that a technological society is sowing the seeds of its own destruction, but I am one who sees it to already be evident.

Up until the existence of the Internet, it was difficult to learn about Druidism and even more difficult to find a Druid to learn from or to share ceremony and ritual with. I had already been studying magic for a few years when I found my first useful book on the subject (Ross

Nichol's 'The Book of Druidry'). About 3 years later I was learning how to make rudimentary websites as part of my job, as a Graphic Designer. At this stage it wasn't entirely clear if the Internet was a passing fad or the way of the future, but I was hedging my bets, like my boss and many people involved in business.

Now the notion of the Internet just fading away seems utterly ridiculous, and it has not only become ubiquitous but is evolving beyond the external experience of a computer and portable devices to wearables, implantables, virtual reality (VR) and enhanced reality (ER), with the assistance of artificial intelligence (AI) accelerating this process. Already almost perfect copies of humans (avatars) have been created, but currently with limited usability. Within a few years we will see perfect replicas of ourselves existing with VR environments, interacting with other people and AIs that appear indistinguishable from the real thing.

I find such a prospect both fascinating and terrifying - the process of specialization and deskilling described by Alvin Toffler in the 1970s seems to be approaching a point of completion, where humans could become entirely reliant of technology to live a 'normal' life. I can see a time when people like myself will be viewed as 'weird' or a strange anomaly for not fully embracing the technological life on offer.

While some do not see the potential dangers of over-reliance on any one thing, particularly computer technology in this case, I see many examples of 'putting all your eggs in one basket' leading to a drastic societal failure in the past. A few examples from the Britain and Ireland that spring to mind. The first is the catastrophic colonial venture of the Scottish government in Panama (the Darien Scheme) that bankrupted the entire nation and led to the union with England in 1707. Another is the horrific and tragic Great Famine of Ireland, 1845-52 (and a small part of Germany), that led to approximately 2 million deaths in Ireland and another 2 million fleeing for their lives to other countries. The over-reliance on potatoes was a combination of poverty, laissez-faire colonial government, ignorance of agricultural techniques and an inability to escape from a

desperate situation.

The final example that came to mind was the much earlier disaster of the Iceni rebellion against Roman governor Gaius Suetonius Paulinus in 60CE. The revolt was led by Queen Boudica, following the death of Roman-appeasing leader Prasutagus (in what is now Norfolk) in revenge for her flogging, the savage rape of her two daughters and the imposition of direct rule. After a brief campaign of retribution she led her entire force to their deaths in a battle at Watling Street - crushed by a Roman force of perhaps 1/5 or 1/6 the size. According to Roman historian Tacitus, neither the women nor the animals were spared and Boudica poisoned herself after escaping with a small retinue. There was no living to fight another day - it was the end of the Iceni tribe.

As you can see, throwing oneself 100% into a venture can lead to disaster if you have no other options prepared, no escape route and alternative plan for yourself. I see the potential for this new world of VR and AI being a similarly catastrophic venture for humanity. Not only that, I do not like the idea of virtuality - I like the real world, I like plants, animals, the outside, being in nature!

In fact I would say that out in the forest, in my garden or exploring some wild mountain or coastal region are my favourite activities and where I feel most grounded and at home in my being. So I cannot see, for the life of me, why any Druid would wish to embrace a life conducted inside a machine environment that is entirely artificial.

Some may say that we can 'have the best of both worlds' - dip in and out of VR/AI existence and return to the grounding normality of the 'real world'. This might be possible for some, particularly those of us that have grown up in the pre-Internet time period. However, I seriously doubt that most people will be able to comfortably or frequently switch between the two and cope with that, without some kind of mental divergence or mental illness occurring.

The world of VR is like magic, it is an illusion, in the way that slight-of-hand and commercial magic for entertainment is an illusion. None of it is real or actually sustainable if the electricity supply is suddenly turned off. Real magic is based in an generated by the human mind and within the context of our natural world, in fact very often drawing on the energies and power innate within the land itself.

VR may be a pretty and convenient replica, a substitute for real-life, but that is what makes it particularly dangerous, as far as I am concerned. So, having steeped myself in the mythology of Ireland and Wales particularly and also the Greeks, I see the warnings of pride, hubris, foolishness, rash and irresponsible or selfish actions scattered throughout. Llewelyn The Great's rashness killed his faithful Wolfhound Gelert, The arrogance of Lugh let the 3 sons of Uislin/Usnech die, even after they had fulfilled their tasks, Daedalus' son Icarus flew too close to the sun and fell to his death. There are countless examples of human folly that I could mention.

I have concluded that as Druid, I can go no further down this technological road, to do so would be to risk everything that makes me a Druid and indeed everything that makes me human. So, I will content myself with a computer, a smart phone, a calculator, my books, DVDs, CDs and vinyl collection, and the occasional trip to a cinema or live concert.

I do not really need to immerse myself into this immersive world of technological marvels, as I am quite content with the life I already have. At any time I can look out of the window, open it up if I want. Hell, I can even get up and go out into the world of this planet that has sustained my life and that of my ancestors for millions of years! This planet is the real technological marvel - the marvel of life itself and all its myriad combinations and intricacies. I do not need or want the magic of AI and VR, the real magic of the Earth, the Sea and the Sky and of the Heavens above us is right in front of me and all around me. While technology is a wonderful tool, it cannot replace living, it cannot replace real-life in any meaningful way and to attempt to do so can only lead to one outcome (as far as I can see) - disaster.

Luke Eastwood is a Druid living in the West of Ireland. He is a graduate in Business Computing Systems and previously worked for many financial, technological and design companies. He is horticulturist, celebrant, environmentalist and the author of many books on spirituality and other topics. You can find more of his work at lukeeastwood.com.



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