

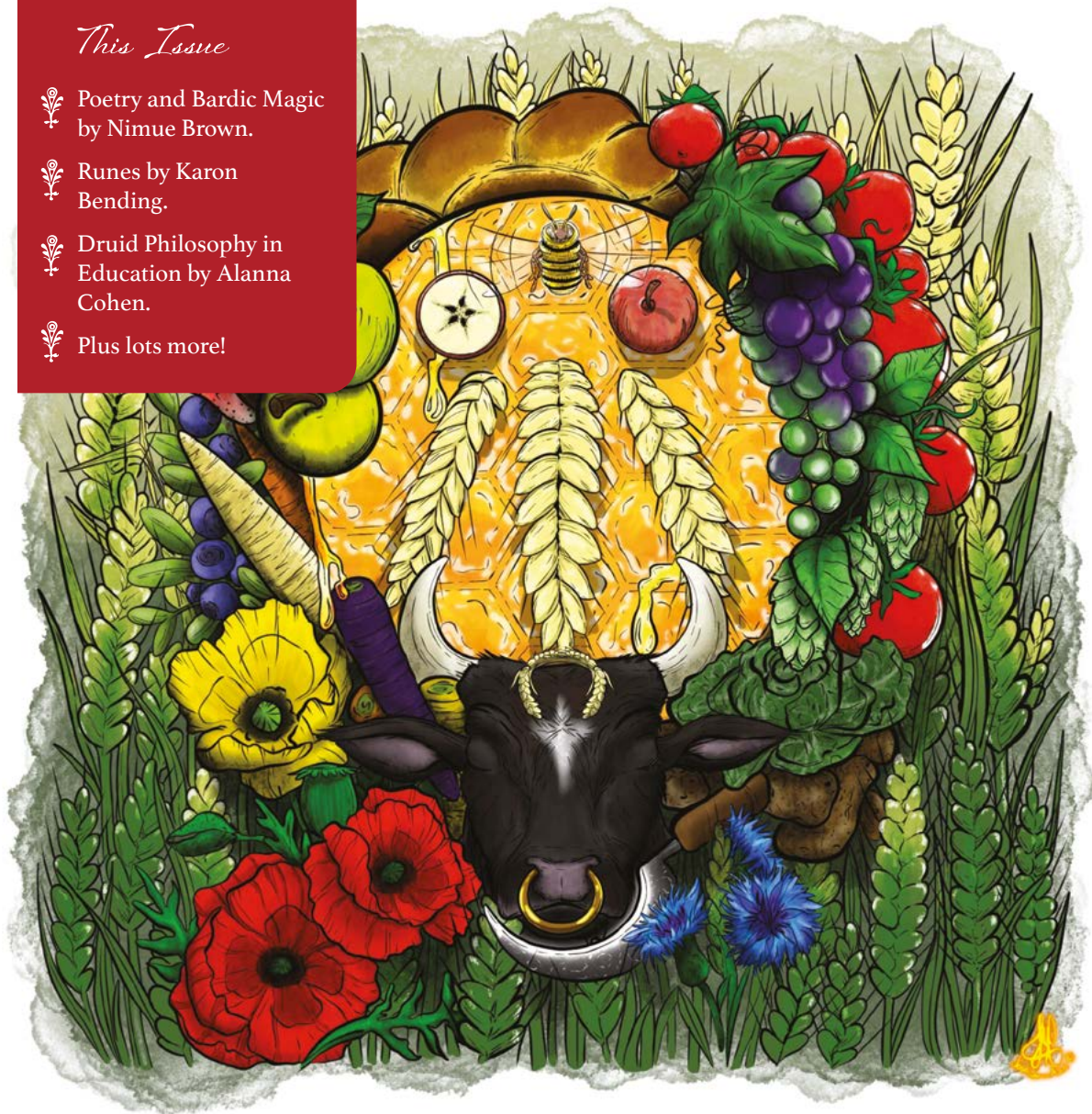
TOUCHSTONE

The journal of
**THE ORDER OF BARDS,
OVATES & DRUIDS**

August 2024 | Issue 324

This Issue

- ✿ Poetry and Bardic Magic
by Nimue Brown.
- ✿ Runes by Karon
Bending.
- ✿ Druid Philosophy in
Education by Alanna
Cohen.
- ✿ Plus lots more!



COVER: "Lughnasadh" by Josh Warren

Editorial

Welcome to August's *Touchstone*!

It's Lughnasadh and what a wonderful harvest we have for you this month. There are some cracking articles, such as Nimue Brown's inspiring piece on poetry and bardic magic. Nimue is going to be writing more for *Touchstone* in future and it's wonderful to have her on board. There is Magdalena Lola's beautiful and magical piece about the Midsummer Fay and a Bard's Page which is brimming with creativity and colour. And for those 'back to school' vibes, we have Alanna Cohen's piece on Druid Philosophy in Education.

Our *From the Archive* section this month is a celebration of Polly Morris' contribution to *Touchstone* as we reprint her article about the Airts alongside one of her pieces of art. There's also a short obituary to Vernon Marshall who passed away recently and who was described by one who knew him as "a beacon for us all".

At the Summer Gathering I was handed a beautifully drawn sketch, which led to conversation between myself and the clearly talented artist, Josh Warren. In passing, I asked if they would be interested in creating a cover for the Lughnasadh edition of *Touchstone*. Josh took the idea and ran with it, creating the joyous piece of art on the cover. Did you notice the two apples and the bee as the spots of awen? The detail in the picture is astonishing. Thank you so much for sharing your work, Josh. It is amazing.

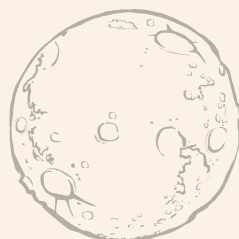
And on that note, it's time to indulge in all of the goodies Lughnasadh has in store. Enjoy!

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A Lughnasadh Haiku by Janet Elvidge

Harvest moon on high.
Nature's bounty gathered in
Golden mead flowing.



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Opinions/statements by contributors are not necessarily those of the editor, Order or publishers. Submissions from members are welcomed, but it is not always possible to use everything offered for publication. Contributions must focus on Druidry or contributor's experience of Druidry and may be edited without consultation unless a request is made to the contrary. Poetry no more than 40 lines. Deadline for events inclusion is 5th of the month before publication. Submissions may be printed on the OBOD website unless requested otherwise.

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Chosen Chief's Bit

Bandia a chairde! Greetings from a rather dull, wet, and cool Kilkenny! I am aware at the same time that we have members in other parts of the world who are praying for rain to prevent wildfires.

I have been asked by many people to teach the Order's prayers in Irish so I thought this month as we approach Lughnasadh I might offer you the Druid's prayer as Gaelige with phonetics. My apologies that they are English phonetics only.

The Druid's Prayer.

Urnaí an Draoi.

Ur-knee on Dhree.

Grant O Spirit thy **Protection**,
Tabhair dúinn, a Oll-Spiorad, do **Chosaint**,
(Toor doing, ah Ull-Spirid, dhu Cussant,)

And in Protection, **Strength**,
Agus i gCosaint, **Near**,
(Og-iss ih Gussant, Nyarth,)

And in Strength, **Understanding**,
Agus i Near, **Tuiscint**,
(Og-iss ih Nyarth, Tish-kint,)

And in Understanding, **Knowledge**,
Agus i dTuiscint, **Eolas**,
(Og-iss ih Dish-kint, Oh-las,)

And in Knowledge, the **Knowledge of Justice**,
Agus in Eolas, Eolas an **Chirt**,
(Og-iss in Oh-las, Oh-las an Kirt,)

And in the Knowledge of Justice,
the Love of it,
Agus in Eolas an Chirt, an **Grá faoi**,
(Og-iss in Oh-las an Kirt, on Graw fwee,)

And in the Love of it, **the Love of All Existences**,
Agus i nGrá faoi, an **Grá do na Beathaí ar Fad**,
(Og-iss ih nGraw fwee, on Graw duh nah Bah-hee er Fod,)

And in the Love of All Existences, **the Love of Spirit and all Goodness**.

Agus I nGrá do na Beathaí ar fad, an **Grá do Oll-Spiorad** agus gach Maitheas a bhaineann leis.

(Og-iss ih nGraw duh na Bah-hee er Fod, on Graw duh Ull-Spir-idd og-iss gok Moh-hass a wanonn lesh). [moh as in hot]



Over the next few months I will feature the Druid's Peace Prayer and Druid's Vow as Gaelige.

In the meantime may your early harvest be full of abundance and richness for you all.

Beannachtaí
Lughnasadh libh uile!
Lughnasadh blessings
to you all!

Eimear

PS. I always take the month of August off so I will not have Chosen Chief's bit in the September issue but I will be here in October.

Final call for Submissions The Touchstone Folklore Issue

October's *Touchstone* is going to be a Folklore themed edition, perfect for reading as the nights draw in.

We have had some really wonderful submissions so far but there is still time to contribute. I would particularly welcome further artwork or photography to use in the edition. Please dig deep into your portfolios and let me have any pieces you feel fit the theme.

Articles and poetry are still very welcome.

Let me have your articles and stories (1,400 words or less), your poetry (no more than 40 lines), your artwork and photography.

Send submissions to touchstone@druidry.org by 31st August 2024.



Seeking the Divine by John Davis

Standing and staring out to sea,
Straining and hoping to see the aurora;
Such focused attention to something
as yet unseen.

Isn't this outward looking but a reflection
of the interior,
Where meaning is sought and needs of the
self addressed,
Pondering if, where, and how we might
sense "other"?

Whether gazing out, or looking deep within,
here's the thing...
Both can lead the seeker to an enchanted place,
Where soul and "other" may meet and bring some
new thing into being.

Some say that only within hallowed walls and
words we will find
That which feeds the soul and ennoble the mind;
But, I tell you this, wherever you look you may
meet the divine.



Honeysuckle by Cathy Johnson

Wondrous Blue by Janette Putt

The blue in feeling blue,
Understanding that this feeling
Will not last,
Soon to be a thing of the past.

Alone on the shore,
Witnessing
The blue of the sea.
Wind tugging your hair,
Enlivening the exposed skin
Of the face.

Turquoise blue that is
the crystal-clear water of the sea,
Awakening the senses,
distant memories,
joyous, and
sad.
Encouraging one to wander within
and discover
more about who and what we are.

The blue of the sky,
Crisp and clear,
Opening our space,
Spreading to the horizon.
Wondrous.
Whether Winter sky,
Summer sky,
Spring or Autumn,
Beautiful blue
Always there.

Often covered with clouds,
Which will always pass.

As will the clouds covering your being,
weighing you down, making you feel
Blue.
Remember this,
There will always be blue skies,
And crystal-clear waters,
Somewhere
on the horizon.

Lughnasadh by Jessica McGee

We celebrate Lugh for
the harvest's earth-
jewels quickened by
his fires.



The Journey Back

by Linda Davis

Distance is a thing
with boots and blisters
bewildering vistas
mists that surge
and muddy verge
where miles become minutes
or hours or years.
See how length becomes time and
time mocks and twists
like the springs of broken clocks
and the reeds whisper sneering
of yesterday which once was now
and of tomorrows that never come.
But what if
one day
one foot
following another
brings me to
the top of a hill
with the Sun just going down
and I looking
see a small town
of honeyed stone
nestled in a vale of green
by a little tumbling stream.
And hearing the sounds of
music and laughter
catching the scent
of supper cooking in the pan
finding my face wet with tears
I would sit down on the wet grass
undo each tightly knotted lace
ease my feet out bare
to stand on firm ground
and know it
for home.



Late Summer

by Rhyannon Brightwater

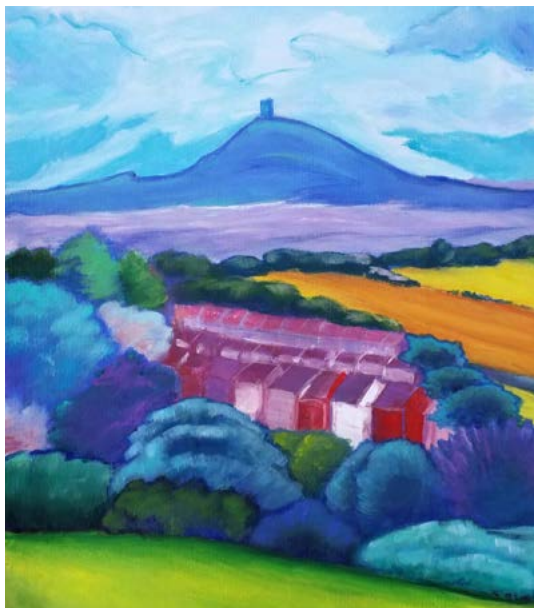
It rained last night in Santa Fe.
The air is still, crisp and washed
Clean of dusty heat.
Fragrance of fermenting peaches
And loamy earth—
Lingers beneath the trees
Along my morning walk.

My favorite tree has been picked clean.
Its branches unburdened
Sprung skyward again—
The timbers that had supported them
Lean against
The grey coyote fence.
I linger to drink in
The ghosts of summer's peaches.

Swan Time

by Giulietta M Spudich

She said,
"It's called Swan Time,
did you know?
When the grasses are high,
towering over your head,
when you sit by the bank
and daisies star the ground, so."
Her hair caught the sun,
the same gold.
Her eyes were black moons
and her cheeks the palest rose.
"Swan Time,"
I said,
liking how it felt
on my tongue and my heart.
But what did she mean?
And where did she go?
I blinked and there was only
a ray of sun,
and further down,
a white swan,
glinting in the light.
She spread her wings
and called
and flapped
and flew
and was gone.
Swan Time.
I sat there, slow.
as daisies shone
on the ground,
and I dreamed,
like the sun,
peaceful and low.



Memories of Avalon

by Magdalena Lola

Poetry and Bardic Magic by Nimue Brown

There's always a wonderful array of poetry in *Touchstone*, and rightly so. Poetry is such a good tool for bardic magic, allowing us to transform ourselves and others in subtle, and not so subtle ways.

In witchcraft, poetry often shows up in rhyming couplets as a way of framing spells and giving them some punch. Bardic magic is a rather different sort of process. When it comes to poetry, the words we craft are not the focus to carry some kind of magical intent (usually). The poem is the magic.

The very nature of poetry means it enters the mind in a different way to regular communications. A poem can head straight to the unconscious. It can circumvent the barriers we construct, overcoming assumptions and habits to strike at us in ways we may not be able to resist. This gives poetry a real power for healing, and also for gently challenging other people's world views. A poem won't usually land with the impact of a fireball, rather it moves more like water, washing away, carving new channels, cleansing and shifting. The most powerful of poems can rock people to their foundations and change how they see the world. Not all poetic magic will be so dramatic, and often it's better to focus on gentler ways of shifting people.

When we write poetry, there's an option to dive into simile and metaphor. That allows us to try and convey things that regular prose language can't touch. It's difficult to convey the numinous, the divine, feelings of spiritual awe and the power of the awen in an essay like this. But in poetry we can bring words together in less obvious combinations, use juxtaposition and unfamiliar phrasing to convey things that do not always lend themselves to language. By doing this, we can open each other to new possibilities.

By the same means, poetry has the capacity to make ordinary things beautiful. Haiku can often be a great example of this, when it captures a moment of the living world in just a few words. The invitation to reflect deeply on a single tree, a blossom, a moment in the cycle of the seasons can illuminate that which might otherwise be overlooked.

Sharing a moment of beauty in this way, we can engage others with the natural world. Many people are overwhelmed by a relentless barrage of overstimulation in their everyday lives. That can have us skimming over the surface of life, unable to properly take anything in, or appreciate

anything. Sharing a poem is a good way of countering this. A moment of reflection and beauty creates a little pool of calm that can benefit others. The reminder to slow down, be open to what's around and to make space for everyday beauties is a genuine service to others.

Poetry is a way of connecting us to soulful things. It can be a means to nourish and uplift others, and to give them respite and spiritual balm. Poetry has a lot to offer the world, and can impact in ways that are greatly needed right now. We can also do ourselves a great deal of good for making time for this process and for the observations that support it. To write poetry, you need to invest time in finding things to write poetry about. By this means, poetry will lead you into a deeper awareness of the world, and a gentle ongoing quest for material that you can weave into new forms. Poetry invites you to live a more inspired and magical life.

The poetry that shows up in *Touchstone* is very often written for fellow travellers on the Druid path – which makes absolute sense in the context of this publication. Writing for people who are not on that same journey is a rather different consideration. Arguably, it's the non-Druids out there who most need opportunities to feel enchanted and to re-engage with the living world and find something soulful in their day. There's no one simple answer to how any of us might achieve that, but it is a good thing to factor into your writing.

When we start out writing poetry, most of us write for ourselves. Poetry is a fantastic tool for reflection and for healing. The process of writing can help us come to terms with experiences, make sense of feelings and explore who we are and where we are going. At the outset you may well need to spend most of your time writing poems that are acts of magical transformation for yourself. In the beginning, you have to first turn yourself into a bard, a seer, an enchanted person who hears the voices of the wild world, the otherworld and the spirits. You have to find your own voice in all of that and your own ways of writing. You have to figure out what kind of magic you are here to do, and how to approach it.

It's good to write for each other, to share that inspiration and the journeys we are on. Poems that reflect our studies, our growth and our involvement with the path itself will resonate with fellow travellers and are a meaningful way of supporting and inspiring each other. Druid spaces are usually good and safe environments in which



to learn how to weave your own particular kinds of creative magic.

How we get that magic more widely into the world is an interesting challenge. How do we speak to the people whose dreams have been invaded by consumerism? How do we soothe the souls of people who think that how much you earn is the only measure of them that matters? How do we re-connect people with the living world so that the world itself is not so brutalised by human greed? How do we cast those bardic spells widely so that the words we craft can make real change?

I've been on the bard path for a long time and this is work that I've had many years to consider. The skills of bards have never been more important or more urgently needed than they are now. Humanity needs to radically re-imagine itself if we are to have any kind of viable future. Each one of us has the power to be part of that process, and to bring out sacred inspiration to the challenge of making change in the world.

Bardic magic is powerful, and can take many forms. We have the means to heal and inspire, to bring vision and hope to a world desperately in need of those things. The more people step up to this work, the more powerful will be the magic that we can co-create.

Lughnasadh by Beth Amos



In Memoriam

Vernon Marshall

by Lynn Rawlinson

Vernon joined the Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids in the late 1990s. He inspired others, firstly as a member, then Pendragon and finally Chief Druid of the South Rheged Grove, which eventually became the Pendle Grove. Vernon was a lovely man and a patient teacher. His dedication to the grove was unsurpassed and he was always a friendly face and welcoming presence to new members. When I asked grove members to share their thoughts about Vernon, two things stood out. One was the wonderful stories that he told at our Eisteddfods, the second is that he often corrected our pronunciation of Welsh, Scottish and Gaelic words, always with terrific grace.

As an ordained minister and spiritual scholar, his knowledge of religion and Britain's indigenous spirituality, culture and history, was unsurpassed. Vernon also produced the grove newsletter, *The Pendle Druid*, and while leafing through some old editions we found these words, written by Vernon: "Only when our thoughts are laid aside can we truly experience the meaningful By losing ourselves in this way, we remove the blocks that prevent us from encountering the divine, however we may understand it. In this state, we realise our own divinity and experience things that we may think we have imagined, but in fact are the products of our spiritual being. Thus there is practical justification for the ceremonies of modern Druids. By participating in imagined evocations that defy the rational, we go beyond the mundane and enter the world of spirit."

And so Vernon has now travelled into that world of spirit, but his gentle, guiding presence will remain with us whenever we meet, in this life and the next.



Midsummer Fay by Magdalena Lola

Lively the river is, that you know. Treacherous that river is, down below.

Through high cliffs she cuts, sharpening the stone. Capricious that river is, my beloved. Beware, one careless step and you might get drowned.

She draws her magic from mountains in the South, she draws her power from the Earth she divides. Twisting like a willow twig she runs at a speed, and then this narrow serpentine, turns into a white lamb, opening to the side, to the rocky shore.

Guarded by the tallest hill, surrounds to the pastures in their summer green, where on the longest day the feast will begin.

The fires will be raised and will burn bright. Many will come to celebrate the night, as the sun shall set, celebrating the dark. The people shall dance and jump and sing, and eat, make merry and drink. Over the burning flame old tales will be spun, but before the colours of the dawn, you better be gone.

For in these moments between Eos and the light of the morn, another fire will be ablaze, on this tall hill casting cold glimmers of eerie grey. Beware going near that warmthless glow, for its flickering is not for mortals to know of. That is the gathering of the fay. Rusałki their weird music there will play, enthralling voices weird songs will sing. And most of all, they shall chant a call, to all the suffering souls. Of women, who in life were bitterly betrayed. Who, as they died, rarely of an old age, were seeking justice for the wrongs, that they saw.

Hear, the ringing of the fairy song.

To join the wildest dance, to end the story that doesn't want to change. Come, as an offering, leave your pain to feed the flame. So, follow the lead of the dance to heal and let your anger burn bright.

As the dawn breaks clear, join the march of the unseen. Make your steps be loud. Make them echo in the South and the East, to scare away those who wish to

harm any woman or child, any elder or man, or to invade their land.

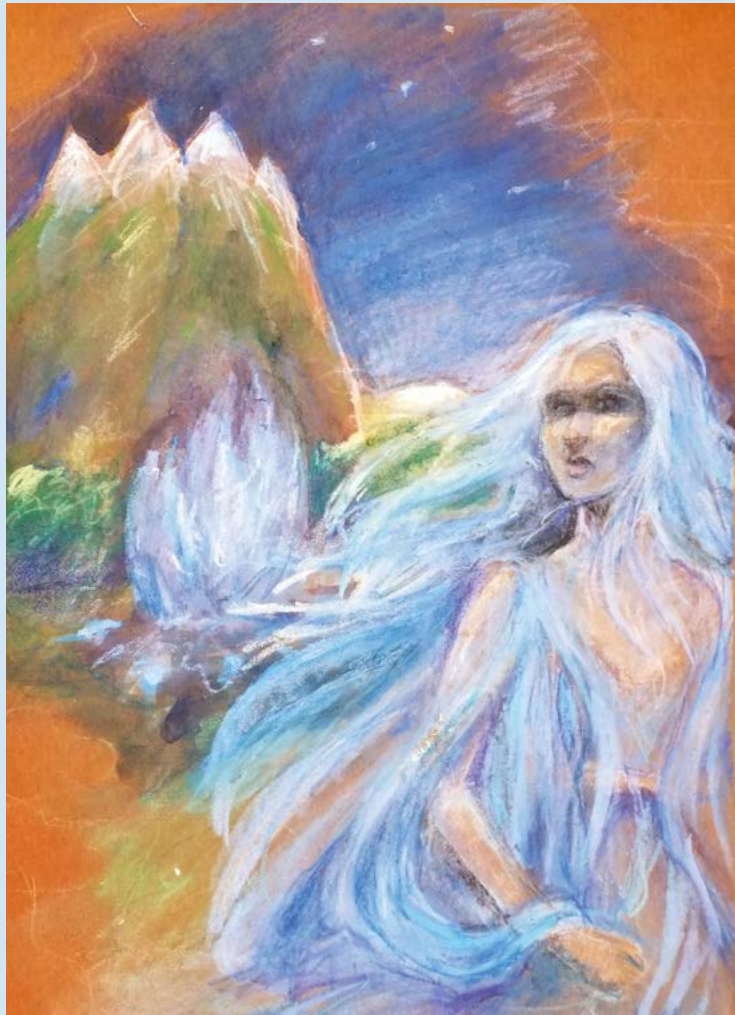
Let your voice be strong in the West and the North, so it shatters all bombs, before they can be set off to destroy any more homes.

Come, jump through the cold flame and be cleansed of the shame, of tears, of feeling too weak and small. For together we may enact the change on this plane.

Dance, dance by the light and nourish your bruised, frightened heart. Too much blood was already spilled, for anger to held in. So, jump through the flame. Let the fire transform, that fury, into a sustainable form, that will support us all.

So, carry on your tongue, this fairy song.

Chant it loud as you go, from now on.



From the Archives

The Airts by Polly Morris

This wonderful article was originally published in Touchstone in July 2018. Polly originally trained as a nurse, but went on to study literature and art, becoming a regular contributor to Touchstone. She passed away in May 2021 and it is lovely to share some of her work again and honour her as a creative ancestor of the order.

The Airts are the winds as the Celts knew them. To the ancient Celtic people all things had life and individual being, so the winds too carried their own personality. They could be fortunate or unfortunate, or bring good luck and a long life, or be the bringer of death; and each wind had its own colour. This is an account of the Airts as experienced by a present-day Druid living on the north-facing coast of the Severn Sea, the estuary of the river Severn [known more prosaically as the Bristol Channel].

The Celtic wind from the East was purple and brought good fortune, maybe, I'm just guessing, because it was the direction from which came rare, costly and exotic merchandise fit for a king, amber, spices, incense. Here, a wind from the east is relatively unusual. Indeed the sustained 40mph easterlies that we experienced this winter were unprecedented. Coming from the great European landmass, the east wind is bitterly cold in winter and warm, sometimes even hot in summer. Unusual as it may be for us, it really showed us what it is capable of this winter! It blows directly out of the East, as straight and undeviating as a Roman road and flattens the sea into low white waves. It is generally a dry wind, as if drawn from the desert, or perhaps from the high eastern plains and steppes.

The south wind on this north-facing coast always carries with it the smell of farmland - not always a sweet smell! South is often the direction of thunderstorms. Today it is deliciously soft, caressing the skin, no chill palpable at all. It is a dreamy wind carrying the breath of poppies and Persephone in her summer aspect. Its movement is spiral, and it can be stormy, suggesting tornadoes and typhoons, but not here, not today, as we bask in the soft warmth. To the Celts the south wind was white and promised long life.

The north wind is Celtic black. It comes from a place that is always cold, so brings a chill whatever the time of year. It roars and moans more than any other wind. The nor'wester is the one that really builds up a big sea here, great swells hurtling in from the Atlantic on a hectic tide, for we have here

on the Severn Sea the second largest tidal range in the world, some 30 metres. A wind like this keeps our small fishing fleet safe and warm at home. Whenever there is a big storm, everyone turns out to watch the crashing waves, as if in a community act of witness. When the lifeboat is called out, a warning maroon, or rocket, would be sent up with a great BANG, night or day, so that all of the town would know about the launching, and would turn our thoughts to 'those in peril on the sea'. But now, Health and Safety in its wisdom has forbidden this time-honoured practice. Perhaps someone complained about being woken up at night. So now, sadly, the launching of the lifeboat goes unannounced.

The west wind, coloured 'dun' by the Celts, is our most frequent wind. It is never very cold, nor ever very warm. This wind is as sinuous, supple and strong as a snake. It carries the tide before it, harrying the waves all the way up the estuary, building higher and higher swells as it approaches the estuary's bottle neck. In partnership with a warming sea, it sets a temperature differential that brings thick sea mists, or 'frets'. Such a sea fret will draw all warmth from the air to feed itself, and the temperature drops like a stone, turning May into November and ruining many a promising day on the beach. Sometimes the west wind brings a great deal of moisture with it, cloaking us in invisibly fine rain as if it has brought the Atlantic itself in to stalk the streets of our town, and making us breathe ocean. In its drier persona it brings salt that turns susceptible leaves brown and crispy overnight. A sou'wester, like its northern counterpart, will quickly build a big sea.

There is another wind that the Celts called 'speckled'. Its direction was from the north east, but the name of the speckled wind seems to indicate that it blows from the Otherworld, yet another Celtic mystery to unravel.



Runes by Karon Bending

Runes are the letters of the alphabet which was used by the Proto Norse people of Scandinavia. The word Rune was thought to be from the Germanic word meaning mystery, secret, or murmur and were thought of as secret shapes that were used for writing. Writing itself was thought of as “magic” as it was a communication that lasted longer than speech.

The runes of the Elder Futhark like our Roman alphabet normally denote sounds or abbreviations and it is not known if these individual letters were used to mean anything on their own other than the individual sounds. The names of the letters of the Elder Futhark have been reconstructed by academia based on the names of these runes in the Norwegian and Islandic rune poems. The sounds were the sounds needed for the Proto-Norse language at that time in the 3rd to the 7th centuries.

Modern interpreters of the letters have assigned meanings to these letters for the purpose of divination based on the names given and can be used in a similar way to casting Ogham.

The oldest form of runes, known as the Elder Futhark, from the first six letters of the alphabet i.e. F. U. Th. A. R. K. and has 24 letters. The rows are in this order:

Rune – Sound – Name (Pronunciation) - Meanings given for divination purposes.



ƿ F Fehu (FAY-hoo)
Livestock, (the potential for success, belongings, abundance, wealth, material gain).
ᚱ U Ūruz (OO-rooz)
Bull, (issues to do with strength and health), storm (physical or mental).
ᚥ Th Þurisaz (THUR-ee-sahz)
Giant, thorn, (defence, disruption, things getting in the way).
ᚦ A Ansuz (An-zooz)
A germanic god “Ansuz”, (a message, estuary, communication, understanding, inspiration, flow of information).
ᚷ R Raiðō (RIDE-o)
Ride, (a journey, wagon, travel by land, momentum, rhythm).
< K Kauna (COW-na)
Blister, (illness or injury), torch, (vision, creativity, inspiration, clear sightedness).
ᚷ G Gebō (GAY-bo)
Gift, (giving or receiving, balance, partnership, generosity, relationships).
ᚹ W Wunjō (WOON-e-o)
Joy, (a feast or celebration, comfort, belonging, community).
ᚨ H Hagalaz (HAG-alaz)
Hail, (destruction, natural disaster, tests, change).
ᚠ N Nauðiz (NOW-these)
Needs, (restriction, disagreements, resistance, survival, necessity, lacking).
ᚢ I Ísaz (EE-sa)
Ice, (frozen progress, suspension, delay, stillness, frustration, blocks, pause, waiting).
ᚳ J Jera (YEAH-a-ra)
Year, (conclusion, harvest, life cycle, reaping, learnings, growth).
ᚦ ae eihaz (EY-waz)
Yew, (connection to the past, inspiration, endurance, sacred knowledge, protection, endings).
ᚱ P Perðō (PER-th-row)
Destiny, (It's meant to happen, fate, mysteries, fertility, chance good or bad, fortune, mysticism).
ᚿ Z Algiz (EL-geez)
Elk, (this has been interpreted to mean protection, guardian, instincts, environment).
ᚰ S Sōwilō (SOW-we-low)
Sun, (success, inspiration, abundance, happiness).
ᚦ T Tīwaz (TEA-waz)
(The god) ‘Tyr’, (a sign of victory, leadership, endurance, strength, perseverance).
ᚷ B Berkana (BER-ka-na)
Birch, (birth, growth, creativity, renewal).
ᚱ E ehwaz (EH-quaz)
Horse, (making progress, harmony, trust, loyalty, friendship, assistance).
ᚱ M mannaz (MAN-naz)
Man, (community, morals, relationships).
ᚠ L laguz (LA-guz)

.....

Lake, (relaxing, healing, intuition, imagination).

♦ ng Ingwaz (ING-waz)

The god Ing, (fertility, virtue, peace, harmony, family).

𐌺 D Dagaz (DAAG-az)

Day or Dawn, (consciousness, new cycles, awakening).

𐌺 O Oþala (OTH-e-la)

Home (heritage, legacy, inheritance including knowledge).

There are no records of methods of ancient rune use for divination, but they were certainly used to write charms, and there are records of 'chips' being used for divination. The word 𐌱𐌿𐌺 (ALU) has been found inscribed on artifacts in Europe. It is thought by researchers that this word represents a magic charm, although the actual word means 'ale' (Germanic) or 'dedication' (Etruscan). Perhaps ale was used to pour away illness or bad luck then the cup dedicated to the appropriate god.

Divination is a means of gaining insight into yourself. When a specific rune symbol is chosen at random, the symbol can be interpreted for the deeper meaning it signals to you, so the best way is YOUR way!

Think of your question while mixing the pieces. Pull out a piece and use the list here to guide you to an answer.

There is no need to have an upside down or side-ways meaning.

Some sets have a blank piece called Odin's rune which means it is not the time to know!

Inspired by the Energy of Demeter by Cody Epperson

Dandelions bloom on the first of May,
Hair like freshly cut hay,
Soil warmed by summer's rays,
Observing Demeter's gentle sway.

Golden petals kiss the autumn light,
A harvest pure and bright,
Echoes of warmth in the gentle breeze,
Beneath the bare, ancient trees.



Seasonal Recipe

Lughnasadh by Sue Wilson

One crop that I grow in pots is rainbow chard. It truly is the gift that keeps on giving. As fast as I pick it, more leaves sprout. Its rainbow stalks speak of the fire and light of the season.

RAINBOW CHARD GALETTE

For the Pastry:-

- 2 teaspoons cumin seeds, toasted in a dry pan
- 300g plain flour
- 25g nutritional yeast
- 150mls olive oil
- Salt and pepper

1. Put all the ingredients into a mixing bowl.
2. Add 150mls cold water and stir the mixture until it is combined.
3. Knead lightly to make a soft dough. Place in the fridge to chill.

For the Filling:-

- 1 large bunch rainbow chard, washed. Keep the stalks separate
 - 2 onions, peeled and chopped
 - 4 cloves garlic, peeled and chopped
 - 2 red peppers, washed, deseeded and chopped
 - A large handful of pine nuts
1. In a large frying pan, saute the onions until soft.
 2. Add the garlic and the chard stalks.
 3. Add the red peppers. Cook this mixture for 5 minutes.
 4. Add the chard leaves and a large handful of pine nuts.
 5. Cook for a minute or so until the chard leaves have wilted.
 6. Remove from the heat and cool slightly.
 7. Take the pastry from the fridge and roll it out into a rough circle.
 8. Place the pastry on an oven tray. Place the filling on the pastry, leaving a border of an inch or so.
 9. Fold the pastry over the edge of the filling, crimping it as you go.
 10. Bake in a hot oven for 30 - 40 minutes

Druid Philosophy in Education by Alanna Cohen

I worked for many years on the fringes of our education system after volunteering as a young adult in a place where, although school was technically free, the peripheral costs of attendance were such that many children were excluded through poverty. The charity I was working with was in the process of setting up a school that would serve the poorer families of the town. To these children, school provided hope and they were desperate to attend. This was such a stark contrast to the disillusionment that many children and young people in the UK were facing, where educational attendance was mandatory, yet outcomes were still almost inextricably linked to socio-economic status. Even in my pre-Druid days, my love of justice was strong and this provided me with a cause I could work with. So, I trained and worked as a youth inclusion worker.

Several long stories and a few detours later, I find myself working again in the margins of the education system, because the overall picture has not changed despite numerous tweaks to the details. I am now a home-educator by choice. The choice does not sit entirely comfortably. I do not believe that educational segregation contributes to the greater good of society, nor do I think that dis-integration from mainstream society is wholly beneficial to those who choose it. Increasing numbers of parents are, however, home educating, not by choice but by necessity, with schools unable to meet the needs of children who struggle with the pressures and expectations of the classroom. My discomfort in the choice led me to ask myself the question “What would a Druid do?” (*Penny Billington in a talk some time ago*), what follows is the story of the reflective journey this question has taken me on, with illustrations borrowed from the tale of Ceridwen.

One of the first things home-educators in the UK learn is that ‘education is compulsory, schooling is not’. When we talk about education, most people’s preconceptions will lead them straight to the school classroom. Yet the origin of the word ‘education’ bears little relation to the modern concept of schooling. From its Latin roots, to ‘educate’ means to bring out, or lead forth. Our educators are those that hold responsibility for our upbringing. Education is, essentially, a parental role; or a community role if you hold the

view that ‘it takes a village to raise a child’.

The idea of education as raising, rather than instructing, children is borne out in the common law notion that schools have a duty to act in loco parentis - in the place of parents. Education law in England and Wales also holds that the provision of education is primarily a parental role, stating that “parents should cause their children to receive efficient full-time education suitable to [their] age, ability and aptitude... either by regular attendance at school or otherwise.” (Education Act 1996 s7)

Case law tells us that that a ‘suitable’ education is one that prepares young people for life in wider society and enables them to achieve their full potential and that an ‘efficient’ education is one which achieves that which it sets out to achieve.

I have not written this to advocate for home-education, rather to strip back the layers of preconception encasing education to get to the fundamental question for Druid educators, whatever their setting. Namely, what are we setting out to achieve? Educational purpose begins with philosophy. Beliefs about the nature of being (ontology), inform beliefs about the nature of knowledge and of knowing (epistemology) and from these we derive purpose.

Druidry is, significantly, a philosophy of embodiment and integration; meaning that our cognitive, emotional and spiritual existences are integrated with, not separate from our bodies and sensory experiences. We are at once influencing and influenced by our immediate physical environment; the wider world and the other actors within it, human or otherwise: not separated from the natural world, but part of it and in dialogue with it (*David Abram Spell of the sensuous*). Engaging in such a dynamic relationship with the world, its natural cycles, and often apparent chaos, assumptions of linear knowledge development hold little weight. We find that knowledge can be experienced in many forms, e.g. mythical, rational, instinctive, intuitive (*Claude Levi-Strauss Myth and meaning and The savage mind*); it could be described as trans-formative. I have depicted knowledge here as something that we experience rather than something we acquire, construct, or even co-construct. We experience knowledge through being-in-relationship and in that act of being-in-



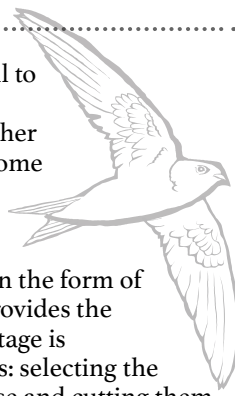
relationship we influence and are influenced by that with which we are in relationship. In other words, the experience is transformative (*Kristoffer Hughes, Ceridwen*).

Of course, not all transformations are beneficial or desirable, so this brings us back to the question of purpose. The common goals of druidry are love, creativity and wisdom (*Philip Carr-Gomm What do Druids believe*). If knowledge is experienced through being-in-relationship and we want the transformative experience to be beneficial, then love is the place to start. The language of love may be uncomfortable in the classroom, so we could talk about unconditional positive regard (*Carl Rogers On Becoming a Person*) or relatedness (*Deci and Ryan Self-Determination Theory*), here I will stick with love. Paolo Freire (*Paolo Freire Pedagogy of the Oppressed*) describes love, in education as both an act of bravery and an act of freedom, neither sentimental nor a pretext for manipulation. For Freire, love is both the foundation and essence of dialogue and it is through such dialogue that learners experience transformational knowledge. The education system in England, is not particularly conducive to such acts of freedom. It is set up for top-down accountability, not for responsibility to our learners or their families. In teaching to test and showing zero tolerance for disruptive behaviour our work rapidly becomes a pretext for manipulation and not an act of love at all. Where teacher training covers dialogic pedagogy, it is usually the kind of dialogue that must be steered towards a pre-determined goal. It can be hard to escape this when you must demonstrate progress towards particular academic outcomes regardless of learner needs. However, if we can consciously commit such an act of bravery by entering into authentic dialogue with our learners, we ourselves may be transformed in the relationship. I believe that inviting this process of transformation is fundamental in the Druid quest. This blurs the line between learner and educator with each taking on both roles and the following analogy may be read from either and both points of view.

Few people will transform as rapidly as Gwion Bach running from Ceridwen, but although these first transformations were rapid when they came, they were preceded by the long process of creativity as ingredients were gathered prepared and simmered until the potion was ready to offer up its illumination (*Kristoffer Hughes Ceridwen*).

Creativity is often thought of as an artistic endeavour, but, like knowledge, creativity can take many forms. To nurture creativity in our

education settings it is helpful to think of it as a process that is beneficial in its own right, rather than simply as precursor to some artistic production. The process begins with being curious and explorative, gathering ingredients. Love, in the form of dialogue with our learners provides the gathering ground. The next stage is preparation of the ingredients: selecting the memories and resources to use and cutting them to size before simmering. The simmering takes time which allows for reflection. As ideas simmer, we may develop a sense of how the mixture will turn out or may decide there is something missing and add to it. There follows the moment of illumination, the first taste of the potion. And then the chase: intuitive, exhilarating, experimental and somewhat otherworldly. Now the idea, like Gwion, may lie dormant in the dark for some time before being fortuitously plucked from the stream and fully entering the human realm (*Kristoffer Hughes Ceridwen & Tina Bruce Cultivating Creativity in Babies, Toddlers and Young Children*). What does this mean in an education setting? It means we start with love, we provide a safe space for the exploration of ideas, offering dialogue and resources to draw these from and we allow time, without pressure for ideas to simmer. Our role in this is to tune into our learners, value them as individuals and support the development of their autonomy. At moments of illumination we may offer challenge but ultimately, like Ceridwen we accept that we cannot control our learners, we can only offer safety and warmth as we release them to their journey with the salmon.

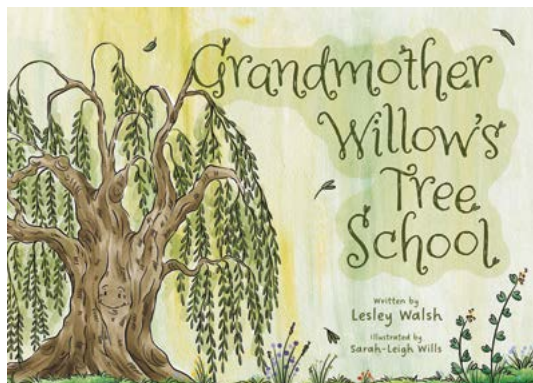


An Extract from “Precious Bane” by Mary Webb, 1924

“I watched the grain week by week from the time when it was all one green till it began to take colour... And it shone nights as if there was a light behind it, with a kind of soft shining like glowworms or a marsh light. I never knew, nor do I know now, why corn shines thus in the night of July and August, keeping a moonlight of its own even when there is no moon. But it is a marvellous thing to see when the great Hush of full summer and deep night is upon the land.”

Reviews

Grandmother Willow's Tree School by Lesley Walsh



This is a charming book which aims to educate and inform children about the world around them. The book begins with children being invited into a grove to learn along with some young trees. Interestingly, it is the trees who ask the questions of Grandmother Willow, which foregrounds the experience of the trees, creating empathy between them and the human reader.

To begin with, the book explores the differences and similarities between trees and the young readers – questions such as how trees and people talk to each other, how they eat and drink and how our bodies are alike. My favorite response from Grandmother Willow is to Horn the Hawthorn's question "Why do some trees leaves fall off in winter?" The answer finds a beautiful link between trees and human bodies. You will never look at going to the toilet in the same way, I can promise you that!

As the book progresses, the questions become more difficult and focus on why the Earth is in such a poor state. These questions and their answers are rightly sombre so Walsh finishes the book with a suggested song and dance.

Each page of this book is a lesson on its own. While this book would be excellent for a range of young readers, I feel it would be particularly valuable for children who are homeschooled. Each page could be a short daily lesson and there are a number of suggestions at the back for how the ideas can be extended and explored further.

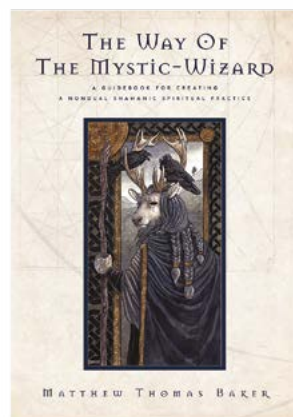
The book is bright and colourful, inclusive and fun. It is highly recommended for 5-7 year olds and will help them create genuine connections with the natural world.

The Way of the Mystic Wizard by Matthew Baker

It took me over a year to completely read and practice this book. I say 'practice' because this is what is required of us when we purchase this book. Matthew Baker makes it clear from the beginning that the creative process outlined in his book requires us to be fully present, so as to begin, develop and habituate this practice for ourselves. Baker describes to us what a Mystic Wizard might look like, conjuring images of Gandalf or Merlin, but then crucially, he guides us on eleven journeys, with accompanying suggestions for supportive material-world help.

Baker guides us to explore powerful and important aspects of self. He introduces foundational Buddhist principles, archetypal psychology, shamanism, Druidry, and depth psychology, alongside tools which can be helpful for understanding other complex theories. Baker's book is a real gift of magical connection. As you work through this book, you will journey into the inner world, which Baker masterfully creates in his guided visualisations (Audio versions are available for those who enjoy listening to guided meditations). There you will meet animal guides, find sacred places, meet wise beings and teacher souls. Baker skilfully takes you from and back to the material-world; his experience with guiding people many times before is reliably present.

I recommend this book for those whose own spiritual path seems to be taking them inward. It would be a great practice book for those who are being called to where mystic wizards and teacher beings are on the inner plains. For those who benefit from a regular practice that focusses on being guided through movement towards deeper states of consciousness and personal/cosmic explorations, this book is for you. For more information about Matthew Baker's work, please visit his website: <https://matthewthomasbaker.com>



Reviewed by Hari Sams

Andrew's Bit At The Back

In my other life, my non-magical, non-Touchstone life, I am lucky enough to work as an Environmental Manager for the organisation which looks after the homes associated with William Shakespeare and his family. It is a wonderful place for a Druid to work (Nature, tick, Ancestors, tick) and no two days are ever the same. However, an early morning ritual we perform three times a year has become my favourite part of my job. Those are the mornings we catch moths.

Shakespeare did not write extensively about moths, although the word is used as a character name in both *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Love's Labour's Lost*. In both cases, it shows that the character is small, physically in the case of the fairy from *Dream* or in terms of social status in the case of the Page in *Love's Labour's*. Interestingly, the Oxford Shakespeare editions of these plays calls both characters Mote, which could be an indication of original pronunciation and which also means something incredibly small.

But I digress (as is so often the way when I get talking about Shakespeare). About twelve months ago I engaged the services of the Official Moth Recorder of Warwickshire to come onto our sites and tell us what moths lived in our orchards. Moths are an excellent measure of the health of an ecosystem and, I must admit, at that stage that was the only reason I was interested in them. However, that first murky May morning we opened the moth traps, a whole new world was revealed to me.

Moths are fascinating and completely magical little beings. From the intricately patterned Mervielle du Jour to the beautiful Buff Tip, which is indistinguishable from a broken silver birch twig, once you start looking at them closely you find there is so much to appreciate. There are over 800 different types of moth in Britain and they each have their own beauty, their own stories to tell.

From a professional point of view, the most rewarding moth we found was the Silver Cloud, a nationally scarce moth which lives in abundance in our orchards. However, I am now very much of the mindset that every single moth we catch (and release) is special and worth celebrating. Take the stunning Puss moth, pictured right, which happily sat on the net as we admired their beauty. I know another Bard, William Blake, wrote that we could "see a world in a grain of sand" but try staring into the iridescent eyes of a moth on a misty morning and you will be transported to a whole different level of reality.

So much is hidden from us in everyday life. Even 420 years ago, Shakespeare dismissed moths as small, annoying things, like his character from *Love's Labour's*. For many people, a moth is just moth. Except it isn't just a moth. It's an Orange Footman or a Black Rustic or a Dewick's Plusia. There is a whole magical human language around these little beings, giving them names thick with symbolism and inference, before we even begin considering their patination, their habits and behaviour. The closer you look, the broader the view becomes, like fractals spinning further and further away from our day-to-day lives.

Opening moth traps is a bit like Christmas morning – the expectation of what you will find under the tree is thrilling. However, unlike Christmas, I have never been disappointed by the contents of a moth trap. Surprised, yes, but disappointed, never. I urge you to go to the opening of a moth trap at least once in your life – you'll never look at the world in the same way again.

Until
next time,

Andrew iii





Events



To find Events from OBOD members and friends throughout the year, check the events page on the Druid Hearth: <https://hearth.druidry.org/events>

OBOD Wheel of The Year Online Rituals

Check the Tune In page on the Druid Hearth: <https://hearth.druidry.org/tune-in>

DATES FOR 2024:

| Alban Elfed: September 21st | Samhain: November 2nd | Alban Arthan: December 21st |



*I am Sun and Moon
I am Whole
I am Flesh and Bone
I am Whole
I am Earth and Air
I am Fire and Water
I am Love and Hate
I am Past and Present
I am Bravery and
Fear
I am Masculine and
Feminine
I am Yin and Yang
I am Magic and
Mundane
I am Peace and War
I am Divine and
Human
I am Life and Death
I am Whole*

Poem & artwork
by Phyllis Swalwell