



TOUCHSTONE

— The journal of —



THE ORDER OF BARDS OVATES & DRUIDS

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This Issue



OBOD: Plus ça change,
plus c'est la même chose
by Penny Billington



The Triple Goddess: A New
Life Stage? by Mea Veritas



The OBOD Cloak
Weaving Myth by Fleur
Camille Pennington



Plus Lots More!



Cover: "Fallow Summer" by Sue Wookey

Editorial

Welcome to August's edition of *Touchstone*!

Despite the fact that I'm writing this Editorial in mid-July, many of the fields around my home have been taken in, meaning that Lughnasadh has already arrived, several weeks early. The same happened last year. The world around us, the one on which we base our seasonal festivals, is changing and changing quickly.

Change is a real theme in this edition. We have a wonderful article by Penny Billington about change within OBOD, which is well worth reading. The article includes some very special photographs from OBOD gatherings over the years too. Both pieces by Isabel Shapcott and Mea Veritas reflect on changes in women's lives and are beautifully expressed. Change is, in itself, a harvest, so each of these articles provide interesting points of reflection at this time of year.

Our cover this month is another offering by the wonderful Sue Wookey. As you know, Sue puts phrases around her artwork and the words accompanying this month's cover read: *"Late Summer in the Golden Groves where Stag runs, the setting sun caught in his antlers, his Hart's heart aflame with fire where he and the Sun are one."*

As late summer burns its way into early autumn, may we be blessed with cool, dewey mornings and a growing sense of balance. It's certainly what the world seems to need at the moment.

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"Harvest Time" by Essy Thorn

It's time to harvest what I've been working the
hardest to grow.

Not all I've sown would come to blossom, but
that's part of the show.

It took some tender love and patience; at the start
it was slow.

But so are many loving labors. And as far as that
goes,

I try my darndest but I'm not much of a gardner.
Though,

I did my best to keep it free of weeds so water
could flow.

Now I'm blessed to see those seeds reach for the
stars and I know

A festive feast is even sweeter when your heart's in
the bowl.

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Chosen Chief's Bit

Bandia a chairde! Greetings everyone!

It is said that August is the boundary between summer and autumn, just as twilight is the interface between day and night and the shore the boundary between land and sea – all liminal times and places of magic, mystery and revelations. Stories can be regarded as liminal – the thresholds between the ordinary and the extraordinary worlds.

Here is a story inspired by a few others:

“Truth and Lie were twin brothers, and one day they stood by a river just outside of town. Lie challenged Truth to a race, claiming he could swim across the river faster than Truth. Lie laid out the rules to the challenge, stating that they both must remove all their clothes and, at the count of 3, dive into the freezing cold water, swim to the other side and back.

Lie counted to 3, but when Truth jumped in, Lie did not. As Truth swam across the river, Lie put on Truth's clothes and walked back into town dressed as Truth. He proudly paraded himself around town pretending to be Truth. Truth made it back to shore, but his clothes were gone, and he was left naked with only Lie's clothes to wear.

Refusing to dress himself as Lie, Truth walked back to town naked. People stared and glared as naked Truth walked through town. He tried to explain what happened and that he was, in fact, Truth, but because he was naked, bright and shining and uncomfortable to look at, people mocked and shunned him, and, refusing to believe he was really Truth, they turned their backs on him. The people in town chose to believe Lie because he was dressed appropriately and easier to look at. From that day until this, people have come to believe a lie much more easily than believe a naked truth.”

There is an Irish Seanfhocal – proverb: Bíonn dhá chos ar bhréag ach ní bhíonn ach leathchos ar an fhírinne — A lie has two feet, but the truth walks lame.

However, that is not the end of the story: “Truth continued to walk among people unclothed and unadorned, as naked as his name. But whoever saw Truth turned away in shame or fear and gave him no welcome. So Truth wandered through the earth rebuffed and unwanted and very lonely.

He noticed that on many of his travels, Story followed a similar path, but unlike Truth, Story was welcomed wherever she went, adorned in her brightly-coloured clothes, speaking her lyrical and poetic language, and flashing her smiles of joy on all who passed her. People just loved Story. One day, Story came across Truth naked and cold, huddling in the doorway of a ruined house. She bent down, worried, and asked why Truth had fallen so low. Truth explained that his nakedness frightened the people, that he was unwelcome and unwanted.

Story took pity on him and gathered him up and took him home. There, she dressed Truth in her beautifully coloured clothes, warmed him, and fed him until he was well again. Together they walked into town: Truth and Story. They knocked again at the doors and were readily welcomed into the villagers' houses. They were invited to eat at their tables and warm themselves by their fires.

Truth wrapped in Story is beautiful and easy to behold and to hear. Since then, Truth travels with Story, and they now find love and acceptance wherever their journey takes them. Story allows Truth to shine. And long may it continue!”

Another Irish Seanfhocal: Bíonn an fhírinne searbh ach ní féidir an fhírinne a cheilt. In English, the truth can be bitter, but truth will out.

Given the crazy and challenging times we live in, with Lie portrayed as Truth and Truth portrayed as Lie, may we as Druids use our faculties to discern which is which.

Siúlaigí ar an bhfírinne ‘is an áilleacht! Walk in truth and beauty!

Eimear 

A Healers Triad by Líaig Ibáir Imbaís

Three ways a healer heals more:
A calming voice, spoken with presence;
Warm hands, offering healing touch with intention;
And a listening ear,
for many answers are found in discourse.





Cereal Killer by Ricky Gellissen

You might seek to scorn or scoff
When I say John Barleycorn's pissed off
At the ever present death threat
From every farmer he's ever met.
Not a single sodding year goes by
When various men do not try
To put their assassination skills to the test,
Especially three dodgy blokes from the West.
He cannot even remember the row
That led them to make their solemn vow.
He's no idea what he said
To make these buggers want him dead.
It's not as if they act alone,
These men who've ploughed and sown,
Harrowed, and thrown clods upon his head,
In previous attempts to ensure that he was dead
No, they hire other men to help them in their deed.
Men who kill for money to satisfy their greed.
Rural mercenaries and bumpkin hit-men are found
With their sharp-edged scythes to cut him to the ground.
To add insult to injury, on top of all that carnage,
There are ropes and knots and a little bit of bondage.
Tied at the waist and bound to a cart,
Some sadistic little sod took a pitchfork to his heart.
Then it all goes just a little CSI.
Crabtree sticks and milling stones are found nearby.
One was used to split skin from bone
And there are bits of Barleycorn residue found upon the stone.
It's not just their homicidal tendencies that make John irate,
But the fact that after every attempt they go and celebrate.
A murder party, with barrels of beer and glasses of brandy.
Well, that's just behaving abominably.
Poor old John Barleycorn.
No wonder he feels so forlorn.
Each year he gets that sense of déjà vu,
Convinced that murder's going to happen all anew.

Kinship by Ann Beer

My kin. It's clear you are,
And I am also yours.
This kinship came so quietly,
And opened many doors.
So though we live so far apart
With lives that are unique,
The spirit-language we all share
Confirms the truth we seek.
This understanding rarely comes
At earlier times of being.
We've had to meet the pains of life
To know what we are seeing.
But when we come together,
And Awen starts to flow,
It is our deep shared practice
That anchors all we know.
I stood beside the Chalice Well
To honour Spring's arrival,
Enclosed within the Circle
So needed for survival.
The energy flowed through us all,
Its generous powers revealed.
And as we chanted, all as one,
Our bond of love was sealed.

Dedicated with thanks to the OBOD community



The World It Is Ageing by Anthony Burns

The world it is ageing
And the times are a-changing
Once more then, to the Gorsedd
As we did, like long ago.

The time waits for no man
A respecter of no one
So let's all to the Gorsedd
As we did, like long ago.

Barleycorn by Ricky Gellissen

The night they killed John Barleycorn
You think they might've been forlorn
When he was dead
They partied instead
Since they knew that he'd be reborn

Opening Up To Nature by Victoria Hiscock

I said hello to a tree today
A wildling outside my front door
I said hello to a tree today
I've not noticed this tree before

I said hello to a fox today
A vixen of pure red and white
I said hello to a fox today
I thought foxes only came out at night

I said hello to a stream today
A stream that flows by my street
I said hello to a stream today
I splashed in the stream with bare feet

I said hello to nature today
A nature that's full of wealth
I said hello to nature today
And in nature I found myself

The Earth Element by Valeria Iannini

The earth is a womb,
the earth welcomes me and brings me back to
my womb.

My hands sink into its silence,
dirt and sacredness intertwined,
the blood of my inner earth
emerges, long hidden,
once judged unclean, now revealed.

I rediscover the sacredness of the earth
and with it the sacredness of my body,
slow rhythms, deep cycles,
times respected, times listened to.

I am a daughter of the Earth,
and I carry it within me.



Image: Gilded Gateway
by Jessica Pixie

Returning to the Source by Jo-animist

Starlings, I merry
Two starlings in the wild cherry,
My first course booklets are here,
As I write
The early cabbage white
Appears,
Amongst the blackberry.

Opening the page I'm home
Returning to the ancient stone,
Beauty in the light there for,
You who sing
Of the magical ring
Upon your farewell tour,
Go in love and roam.



Earth by Maca Smith

That herb patch, all shades of green.
A bear on a cold night.
Worlds beneath my feet.
The Mother who gives and is given.
The journeying roots of trees.
A yielding womb.

Earth, what holds us tight.

Bardic Tales

The Fullness of Spirit by Isabel Shapcott

My trunk thickens. My saplings grow tall and lean. Under my sheltering branches the birds are perched on the edge of their nest, ready to leave. They've taken their first exploratory flights, and come back, and fly off, and come back again, but one day, I know, they'll fly off and make their own nests. My roots have spread wide and stable under the earth. They've had time to grow deep.

But the storm comes. The big black clouds rumble ominously. They yell and scream and trample throughout the heavens. Strong winds tear at branches. Wild rain buckets down in sheets.

Now I am a river. Water of emotions pounded against rock and rapids, ripping away at tree roots, whack into boulders, and down, down, down free fall forever over the cliff, into the deep, dark, bottomless well, and up again, a pool of water, a calm little eddy by the bank of the river. I breathe again. Where am I now? I look around me. The kids are still there, grown into young men now. The husband is still there, looking shocked and bewildered. The same. But nothing's the same.

I am between the worlds. I am mother and wife, and I am? I am small business owner, and I am? I am? I am me. I am looking for guideposts and maps. The pull of the river flows in me now. That river, she's seen some things. She's got places to go, things to do. I know you were all comfortable in the shade of that tree, but I'm a river now, I want to flow.

I am a fish, swimming freely in the river, comfortable and at home in this flow. Not just any fish, I am a Salmon. A strong instinct pulls me back to my ancestral waters. I swim against the current, up the rapids, toward my Home. What is Home for me? From where am I indigenous?

I am a dandelion seed. A puffball picked from the grass by an eager child and blown into the wind. I catch the trade winds and am blown across the world. I settle in a warm, sunny climate, take root, and prosper. I am not native to this land, but I make my home here. I grow to love it, as do my children, and my children's children, and my children's children's children.

I am the great grandchild of that Irish woman. The great granddaughter of the man from Cornwall, granddaughter of the girl who cycled past Stonehenge on her way to school, and I don't know how many greats from the minister from Devon who settled in South Australia to bring the gospel, the Scotsman seeking his fortune on the goldfields, or the convict boy who landed in Sydney Harbour for a crime that was not even recorded.

But the sun still scalds my skin. And the ghosts in the landscape have dark skin and dark eyes and dark curly hair, unlike my own. And the Earth sings with a song that I don't understand, and the carvings in the rocks are not from my people.

The water makes music as it splashes over shale. No wait, is it water, or is it a whistle? I hear voices. "Oh look! There's a salmon! Look over here, Cerridwen, a salmon, already. That's early, the first one."

"Ah yes, Taliesin, a salmon. Maybe she's the Salmon of Knowledge, of all-knowing wisdom of all the world."

"Or perhaps, like I was, it's a shapeshifting Salmon of the Otherworld, but I don't see it being chased by you, a hungry otter. I liked being a salmon, and swimming up stream, much more than I liked being a hare, pumped with adrenaline and running as hard as I could away from you, an excited greyhound. My long



ears could hear your every panting breath. I thought I was free as the wren, filling the air with beautiful song, but it was as a kernel of wheat, the pure potential of seed, that I began to understand my lessons. Then you were a hen, and you ate me. And then I became reborn.”

“Guard those stories, Taliesin. Plant seeds with them. Who knows, perhaps they’ll sprout all over the world. How far have you been, little Salmon? What of the future have you seen?”

I am looking to my ancestral past to find clues and inspiration. What of the Wise Women there? How can they guide me? At first sight they are hag and crone, they are evil and wicked witch. But somebody else has been scratching beneath the surface, amongst the roots, before me. Raven, crow, squarks in my ear and makes me jump, discovers a juicy morsel scratching around and gobbles it up.

I discover Cerridwen, and her beautiful big Cauldron of Inspiration and Science and Knowledge. By the shores of Lake Bala, under the mountains of Snowdonia, she is researcher, she is botanist, she is student and master, she is determined as the mother protecting her son. I can read between the lines and see that she initiated Taliesin, forerunner of Merlin and Gandalf. Taliesin, who became Wales’s greatest bard. Cauldron of Plenty, Cauldron of Renewal and Rejuvenation, Cauldron of Change. Cauldron of Abundant Supply. I am reclaiming the Cauldron.

I discover Cessair. The first person to set foot on Ireland was a woman who led a crew of 50 women and 3 men in her ark that she built to escape from Noah’s flood, so wrote the monks who chronicled so many of the old old stories. I discover Sheila-na-gig, wife of St Patrick, whose image was carved above the door of old churches revealing more than you bargained for. I discover the Cailleach, face carved of stone, who shaped and shifted the very land, she is the oldest of the old. I discover Sovereignty Queen. She is the very Earth that the King must marry to claim right to be King. And should he not honour his pledge, she can, and does, dethrone him.

I am reclaiming the stories. I am reclaiming the Wise Woman. She is there. She is there in the old stories abundantly. I scratch among the grain, an old red hen now, and I find that potent seed and I gobble it up and now I birth a new story. I have travelled to the opposite side of this earth, and I have laid my hands on the ancient stone carvings, and I have asked, here, are these my people? Is this where I am indigenous to? I have drunk from the Sacred Wells and known Home.

And now I am back! Back to the land on which I was born. I am in equal measure grateful to the Elders who have Welcomed me to their Country, and to the ones who have shared the very realness of the pain of stolen land. I am grateful to the spirit who called out to me from within my heart, or was it from within the earth, “your people, they ain’t here, your people are over there, and they’re looking for you.”

I am woman who holds her blood within. I have seen through the veil, between the worlds. My feet are sure upon this earth. I stand tall. My ancestors stand behind me, leading the way.

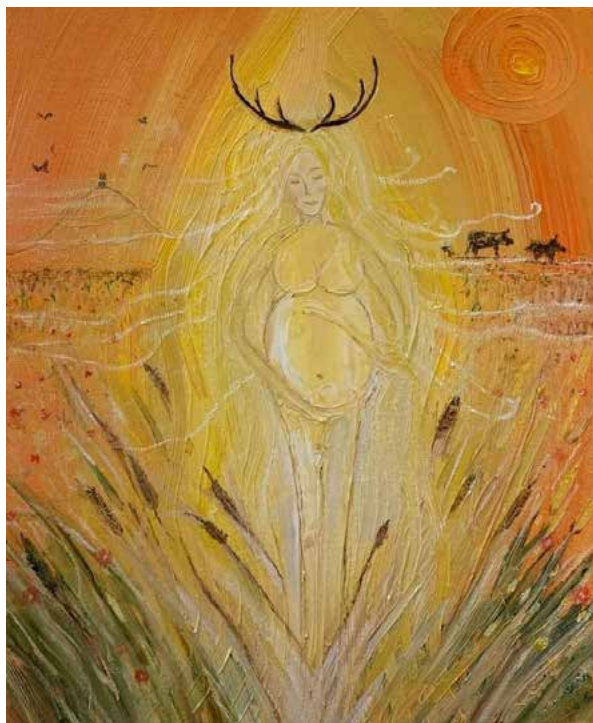


Image by Jennifer Murphy

The Triple Goddess: A New Life Stage? by Mea Veritas

I am passing through my fifty-fifth Winter Solstice, floating gently through this quiet, reflective time toward Imbolc and the beginning of a new year of growth, transition, and lived experience. This cycle of life continues whether we are ready or not. This Wheel of the Year turns endlessly, and each revolution changes us, physically, emotionally and spiritually, year upon year. Life Rites help us prepare, transition and make peace with this flow; they teach us to let go and embrace our new space.

A short yet powerful prayer has been playing on my mind recently, the Serenity Prayer:

God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,

the courage to change the things I can,
and the wisdom to know the difference.

It has led me to contemplate life's key transitions and what lies ahead for a woman at this stage of life. I find myself asking: *What can I change?*

And how do I gracefully accept what I cannot?, the wrinkles, the creaking bones, the earlier nights, the quiet closing of certain doors?

As I move into what is often described as the next life stage, I realise that I do possess a certain wisdom, perhaps not complete, but earned, to discern between acceptance and transformation. Yet at this threshold, the deeper question arises: what exactly is this next life stage? Is it truly Cronedom? Or is this an evolving threshold waiting to be named? For most of human history, a woman's average life expectancy at birth was around 20 - 40 years. Many died during pregnancy, or giving birth, disease and infection could be deadly. It is only in the last 150 years, with advances in sanitation, medicine and maternal care, that a woman's lifespan increased dramatically with most of us today living well into our 70's and 80's, something it could be argued, is not represented in our life span stages today.

I have left the *Mother zone*, yet I am not fully a Crone. I am still creating, birthing ideas, shaping



Image: Eriu by Niamh Hughes

perspectives, generating new ways of being. I am forming a renewed sense of self and focus, none of which aligns comfortably with the conventional image of the Crone. Rather than empowering me, this archetype feels restrictive, misaligned, prematurely applied. This stage feels slightly invisible, but maybe that is the beauty of it. I am challenged not to retreat, but to release and move forward. To continue generating life in a refined, intentional way, still working to stay afloat and expand again in this world. I begin to wonder: *am I alone in this?*

A Dream: In this dream, I stand in a calm, dark sea under moonlight. The water is soft and luminous, gently rippling around me. Moonlight bathes everything it touches. I am alone, yet entirely at ease, surrounded by myself, held by a universal force that carries us all. Chest-deep in warm, salty water, I sway with the moon's rhythmic pull, ebb and flow, inhale and release. I feel sovereign. Present. Whole. The triadic image of the Goddess arises, Maiden, Mother, Crone. Maiden and Mother life stages are behind me. I stand in the water at the threshold of something else. Something unnamed. Another aspect. Another container that holds me as I am, not as I am expected to be. There is a clarity here, an authority over my inner world. Discernment. Choice. Like a warm breeze, the Serenity Prayer returns, inviting me to challenge everything and the dream ends. I had expected to drift naturally on to this next life stage, and perhaps I could have accepted that. But women's lives have changed profoundly since the Triple Goddess framework emerged in not so ancient times. Today, rather than winding down, many of us are re-emerging, still vital, still generative. I feel a softer yet stronger vortex of life spinning within me, centered, grounded, creative. These threshold spaces allow us to question inherited archetypes, cultural norms, and even our own

internalised expectations. It is here that courage meets wisdom, and discernment grows. The word *Sovereignty* arises at this point, and with it, the matriarchal Archetypal Ériu.

Ériu: Goddess of Sovereignty, Bounty and Land:

In Irish mythology, Ériu, daughter of Delbáeth and Ernmas of the Tuatha Dé Danann, is a Goddess of Sovereignty and the land. Sister to Banba and Fódla, she is a matriarchal figure. Ériu is associated with kingship and the sacred contract between ruler and land. She is neither Maiden, Mother, nor Crone — but something else entirely. There is a quiet dignity about her, a steady authority, an embodied wisdom that does not retreat. Ériu represents a Queenly or Matriarchal aspect — autonomous, rooted, discerning. Women live longer now. Our contributions do not end with the completion of the “Mother” period, nor do they dissolve into the withdrawal of Cronedome. I doubt I am alone in sensing this shift. If Carl Jung’s concept of the collective unconscious holds true, many women may already be arriving at this realisation — independently, together. Could Ériu be the archetype that embodies this new emerging life stage, to help us understand this transition, and give us aim?

Why this evolving space matters as a rite of passage: Identifying and acknowledging this evolving space matters. As a rite of passage, it allows us as individuals and communities to formally and subconsciously, scaffold this new transition. Life Rite practices stretch back to Neolithic, Bronze, and Iron Age cultures and continue across societies worldwide in different ways today. We have Life Rites that acknowledge our first breath, last breath and everything in between. But is there one evolving life stage missing?

Modern psychological theories echo this ancient wisdom. Erik Erikson’s stages of psychosocial development, later expanded by Joan Erikson (his wife), reaffirm the existence and importance of these transitions, as crises that must be overcome in order to feel whole. Janusz and Walkiewicz (2018), in *The Rites of Passage Framework as a Matrix of Transgression Processes in the Life Course*, identify three key components of Life Rites: Preservation of life-course sequence, Liminality, deconstruction, integration, transformation &

Performativity, all of which require an identifiable space in which to land. Ageing can dismantle one’s sense of self (Bury, 1991), life rites provide pause for the processing of change. Our ancestors understood this deeply. Does this new space I am floating into need to be recognised?

They remind us that we are not meant to navigate transformation alone, we need each other. A lovely quote from Philosopher and poet Jennifer Hecht highlights this so eloquently:

“We are indebted to one another, and the debt is a kind of faith, a beautiful, difficult, strange faith. We believe each other into being.”

Life Rites occur in the in-between, that serene threshold space where we accept what cannot be changed, transform what can, and cultivate the wisdom to know the difference. I find I have come full circle, and as the serenity prayer has floated down through this piece, I feel it gently land at this closing point: *God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.*”

Life’s major transitions are sacred thresholds, mysterious, intimate, and communal. We travel these passages, witnessing one another as we grow, release, and re-emerge. I will honor my time in this invisible life stage and take my lead from the Archetype Ériu. I have settled into the spirit of my time and place, synergistically intertwined with a sense of sovereignty of self. Strange, yet profoundly beautiful.

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OBOD: Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose by Penny Billington



Penny and Philip (OBOD Camp 1994)

"No man ever steps in the same river twice: it's not the same river and he's not the same man."

This is Heraclitus' famous paradox. The river is the same entity: we can map, swim or fish in it; even if tidal, it has 'thereness' and predictable habits. But the water flows and changes constantly, as do we.

For river, read OBOD, subject to perpetual flow and change: and yet the 'thereness' of its enduring qualities are constant. The spiritual and ethical stance of the teachings; the expectation of good fellowship; working 'for the good of all beings.' All these are why our solitary Druids comment on the welcoming ambience when they stick their shy toes in the waters of our gatherings and events.

Plus change, the first. Saturday's surprise was the honouring of Professor Ronald Hutton for services to the Order. He was presented with the only 'Fellowship of OBOD' that has ever been issued, and the title of Olav - the phonetic spelling of the title Ollamh. In Irish antiquity, it was the most prestigious rank a learned poet or professor could achieve and conferring it on Ronald is our acknowledgement of him as a master in his trade; a person of great learning. We first heard him talk at camp in 1994 and he knocked our socks off with his presentation. Many joyous meetings, waistcoats, chats and literally millions of spoken and written words later, he is still the one and only in our household.

Few realise that Ronald's legendary achievements came at a personal cost. In the dim and distant days that he espoused Paganism as a serious study it - and therefore he - was viewed with suspicion in academe and it undoubtedly slowed his career trajectory considerably: this was a path of service. That he has won through triumphantly as renowned historian and the 2022 Professor of Divinity who broke all Gresham College's records for his online lectures is proof that... he is truly an Ollamh. His service to OBOD particularly includes attendance at every OBOD camp and gathering and facilitating the Dobunni Grove. He has described our coursework as "arguably one of the major documents of British spirituality from the late twentieth century". His responding speech on Saturday was informative, entertaining and laced with wit. Ronald has earned our love and respect and we appreciated him just a little bit more after this session.



Ronald - amazing OBOD audiences for 30 years. (OBOD camp 1995)

Plus change – the second. And then on Sunday morning, we saluted the once and future OBOD. Changes are fluid, but not regular, and sometimes several come along at once. So, following the change of Pendragon last year, this summer was the turn of the last of our current historic 'triad' - of Chosen Chief, Pendragon and Scribe – to step back. We have progressed from Nuinn and Philip to Eimear as Chosen Chief in 2020; through Vera Chapman, Will Worthington and Damh

to Matt McCabe as Pendragon in 2025; and now from Stephanie Carr Gomm to our editor, Andrew Anderson, as Scribe, 2026.

Stephanie is self-effacing, with a strong distaste for 'Shamen-showmen'; but hers has been the invisible influence that has helped keep the Order on track. Steadily, consistently and with philosophical input and the sheer daily graft of organising the office, she masterminded the behemoth of global postings and logistical problems as OBOD was crafted into the international organisation we know today. As was said on the day, her work in the OBOD office early every morning is what has kept the OBOD show on the road during its present incarnation.

Stephanie's vital contribution has been keeping OBOD outward looking and relevant to the world we live in. She has particularly counselled against OBOD becoming parochial and it is thanks to her watchfulness that OBOD has always looked outwards to the greater world, in its spiritual, ethical and ecological stance.

At the first OBOD camp in '94 – my daughter was ten and Steph & Philip's two girls even younger – she was the one who said that camps' lasting value would be to the children. Prescient words. The original 'Camp Brats' were shaped by those early experiences which have given them a broader, grounded perspective. Thirty years later, some still wander the fields and woods as firm friends, sitting by fires, star-gazing and sharing magical times. Without even being in the Order, our camp



Stephanie and the Green Man yurt project beginnings. (OBOD camp 1995)



Children start the Lugh Ceremony (OBOD camp 1994)

children share an OBOD bond, a fellow feeling, whenever they meet.

So thank you Steph: for your attitude, ethics and artistry. For the elegant design and complete recyclability of the Gwersi folders; for painting the animal oracle quarter totems on the Order banners; for devising the Hearth logo for our 50th anniversary and connecting us worldwide by painting it on most continents during that year. My favourite memories are of your oak leaf frieze around a yurt, many masks and costumes for our wide games and camp plays and a puppet-making workshop and crazy ritual at the Eire retreat 2016.



'Life of Finn' puppet ritual - near-decapitation by flying fire goblin Aillen.... (2016)

Through art and creativity, ceremonial and community, thank you for stepping up to serve whenever you've seen a need.

Plus c'est la meme chose...So: change happens, the law of life is flow and after this latest harmonious process, the OBOD river is still flowing sweetly down to the great sea.

What will our new Pendragon and Scribe bring to their roles? Who knows? But they will mediate them through their own creative skills, and I await with interest, and send all my goodwill.

All photos supplied by Penny Billington

The OBOD Cloak Weaving Myth by Fleur Camille Pennington

Somewhere between ocean and oak grove, between solitary practice and global kinship, a cloak is travelling. It carries no insignia, no written creed. Instead, so far, thirty-two embroidered narratives and the spiral-work of more than twenty hands map a different kind of scripture — one stitched in silk, wool, and intention.

This is *Finding the Myth*, a collaborative mantle linking Druids and Pagans worldwide through what might be called the ritual alchemy of thread.

The project first took form in conversation with Eimear Burke on the Druid Hearth. While speaking of my grandmother, of her herbalism, divination, love of nature, and the quiet magic sewn into cloth, I found myself articulating a need I'd long felt: a space for those who work without groves or covens, whose art is their liturgy, whose voice is their hands. How do we bridge borders and worlds without the spoken word? How do we hold the old mysteries in a form that welcomes the solitary maker?

The answer was to weave a story, literally. Practitioners across Albion, Ireland, Europe, the Americas, Mexico, Australia, and New Zealand have so far embroidered their path: landscapes traversed, rituals witnessed, inner journeys rendered in symbol and colour. Currently it now has 32 full embroidery stories woven within its heartbeat and a story of spirals delicately added by 20 or more companions. The cloak has attended ceremonies in wild places, cities, and stone circles, crossing mother oceans to arrive, always, in the company of kin. Its heartbeat now holds the energy of countless hours of meditation, prayer, and craft. This is Druid paganism as tangible culture alongside ancestral lineage. It proposes that art is a universal language and that symbolism can hold both depth and freedom, that we can sit together in council, or in quiet solitude, and still be woven into the same fabric.

For millennia, humans have gathered to share stories. Here, the circle is held by needle and

thread, and the stories travel farther than their makers. In deep love and trust, we are rising, expressing through the creative arts with hearts listening deeply. The undertaking has not been without logistical complexity. Marsaille Ni Bhreathnach, OBOD member, academic, and friend, shepherded the cloak's early pilgrimage with extraordinary care while completing her own master's degree. Her work, largely unseen but deeply essential, made the impossible rhythms of international postage, timing, and trust flow smoothly. She has now stepped back and the project owes her a debt of gratitude.



Image by Fleur Camille Pennington

The intention is to keep gathering stories until the cloth can hold no more, to let the cloak witness ritual in as many lands as possible, and to develop it in future years as an interactive educational tool for sacred art. Following a Key Stage 1–4 RE syllabus I wrote for Devon SACRE last year, we hope to offer experience days that bring this work into wider community contexts.

Alongside the OBOD Cloak itself, there is also a book documenting the many stories from each of the embroiderers, including images.

We also have a short film with music and words which we hope to share in the future. Before the next phase of travel, we will pause in the

UK. A two-day, not-for-profit retreat is planned in Dobunni country near the Welsh borders. Past and future embroiderers are invited to sit, to weave, to share ritual with the cloak, to add their threads to the whole. Accommodation will be available for those journeying from afar. If this calls to you, please send a message with *OBOD Cloak Project* in the subject line to hearthalchemyuk@gmail.com to register interest. All are welcome, those who have stitched and those yet to begin. The old ways did not die. They changed form. They became art, community, and cloth.

For more information and updates see *The OBOD Cloak Project* group on Facebook. This project was initiated in Autumn 2022 By Fleur Camille (Pennington) <http://hearthalchemy.co.uk>



Image: Waiting to be Seen by Tony Cavalline

Druidic Public Health, a Triad by Líaig Ibaír Imbaís

Three unseen hands move the world:
The hand that shapes discourse shapes the outcome;
The hand that shapes language shapes the people;
The hand that shapes truth shapes the rulers.

Reviews

Y Mabinogi; The Fourth Branch by Damh the Bard

In 2018, Damh the Bard embarked on a monumental bardic quest - to set the four branches of the ancient Welsh mythos, *The Mabinogi*, to music. And now eight years later, Damh has completed his quest with the release of the 4th branch. I think that I can speak for many people when I say that reading *The Mabinogi* can be intimidating. I struggled with pronunciation of names and tried my hardest to get it right but for me it's not a casual read.

So being able to listen to *The Mabinogi* in this way is absolutely perfect. What Damh has done here is a profound act of translation, not just with words but also emotion. By interweaving the original text with his own inspired songs and soundscapes he brings the stories to life.

From the moment you press play, the fourth branch demands your attention. I got goosebumps immediately as soon as the chanting started and Kristoffer Hughes read the prologue in Welsh.

This isn't a casual listen, it's an immersive experience. The album masterfully balances the light and the dark. When war returns to the narrative, there is a shift to heavy atmospheric pounding drums and clashing of steel as Math's story unfolds. Yet the album has emotional vulnerability. The hauntingly beautiful *Pryderi's Lament* is a breathtaking standout track, driven by piano and gorgeous chilling harmonies between Damh and the female vocalist.

The way that the album effortlessly switches between narration and song gives constant chills, using melodies to convey the deep grief and trauma of the characters. Part one takes us through the weighty themes of crime and revenge as we navigate Goewin's story but it also brings moments of pure joy. *Son of the Waves* is a track dedicated to Dylan and is an uplifting almost

anthemic song that I immediately imagined as a glorious singalong.

Part 2 pushes us deeper into the magical and supernatural elements of the branch. There is dramatic pacing in the narration in *Lleu and the World Tree* and *The Eagle Flies* as the tension builds, enhanced by atmospheric sound effects that make you feel like you are stepping directly into the Otherworld. The drone work and low end atmospheric sounds on *The Maiden of Flowers* beautifully emphasises the raw and earthy magic which takes place as Blodeuwedd is conjured into existence.

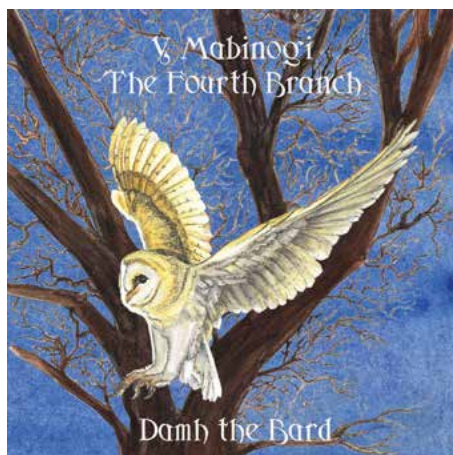
The structure of the album is incredibly clever. The songs are placed perfectly between the spoken words which allows the emotional weight of the story to breathe and settle in the music. By the time we

reach the bittersweet transition of *From Flowers to Feathers*, the tragedy of Blodeuwedd's transformation hits with full bardic force.

Spending eight years meticulously crafting these four albums required immense dedication and you can hear it in every single track of this final volume. For anyone who has ever felt hesitant to pick up the book, as well as those who know and love the stories, Damh the Bard has provided the ultimate companion piece and left us with a masterpiece that will continue to inspire for years to come. This is a true labour of love.

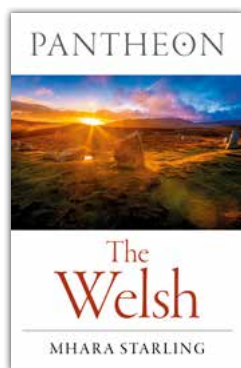
Review by Fiona Graham

**Find Y Mabinogi:
The Fourth Branch
on the OBOD store >**



Pantheon: The Welsh

by Mhara Starling



Mhara Starling's latest book is a joyous celebration of the Pantheon of Welsh deities. It's a book full of both personal and practical reflections, which is infused with magic from the very first page: "In this rugged, ancient landscape of mountains and coast, valley and stream, river and hill, are the stories of

a time when the roars of dragons echoed through the stormy skies This is Cymru."

Starling doesn't shy away from some of the more thorny issues which others have levelled against the idea of a Welsh Pantheon. "Are the Welsh Gods Actually Gods?" she asks, before reflecting "I often view the Deities of Wales as complex jigsaw puzzles in many ways." There are insightful chapters on Apotheosis and Cultural Appropriation along the way.

The first part of the book takes a broad view of the Welsh Pantheon, delving into Welsh History, Mythology, Folklore and Poetry, before outlining some key Welsh Seasonal Celebrations (no, not necessarily the ones you may be expecting) and encouraging the reader to put theory into practice. Starling's depth of understanding really shines through in this opening section and the reader feels safe in the hands of their expert guide.

The second part of the book is an in-depth catalogue of Welsh Deities – everyone from Amaethon fab Dôn to Ysbaddaden Bencawr, with a final section on Yr Ddraig Goch and the Fair Family. What is so engaging in this section is finding names you think you know and allowing Starling to expand your understanding. The section on Arthur is particularly worth reading.

Engaging and authoritative, this is a must read for anyone working with aspects of Welsh culture.

Find Pantheon: The Welsh on the OBOD store >

The Cult of Water

by David Bramwell and Pete Fowler

David Bramwell, who you may well know from his Podcast, *Adventures in Nutopia*, once took a journey of spiritual discovery along the River Don, and *The Cult of Water* is the result. It's a wonderfully evocative prose poem to the power of water and humanity's relationship with our rivers.

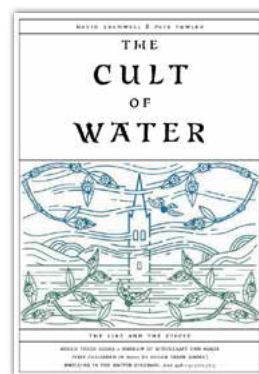
The booklet begins with an old English proverb: "The old pagan gods, when ousted by Christianity, took refuge in the rivers where they still dwell." This is Bramwell's starting point, or more correctly, the idea he is investigating. His actual starting point is the infamous Summer of 1976 and a family trip to the Ladybower Reservoir, where something mysterious appeared from beneath the waters. Haunted by Donald Pleasance's warnings of the spirit of dark and lonely water, Bramwell finds himself trying to find balance between the goddess of the river Don and Vulcan, the "Roman god of fire and forge" who holds sway in the steel town of Sheffield.

Bramwell calls on an array of helpers for his journey, everyone from "England's greatest living wizard", Alan Moore, to a Sheffield shop-keeper called Anwen. Even Jarvis Cocker provides some inspiration. Bramwell's field of reference is astonishing, and the narrative swirls and eddies like a powerful stream, bringing all kinds of jewels to light.

To tell you any more about this short book would be to spoil it. While it's a quick read, it will stay with you for a long time. As a river teaches us, it isn't always the destination which is important but the journey – and what a journey this is.

With evocative illustrations by Pete Fowler, I cannot recommend this astonishing voyage through words and water highly enough.

Find The Cult of Water on the OBOD store >





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

Upcoming Events

Druid Gorsedd: 5-7 March 2027, Cornwall. For more information email druidgorsedds@obod.org

Druid Gorsedd: 2-4 April 2027, Tettenhall College, Wolverhampton. For more information, contact druidgorsedds@obod.org. Please mention 'Tettenhall Gorsedd' in the subject line of your email.

Winter Gathering: 12 December 2026, Strode Theatre, Street (some introductory activities on 11 December)

SHOBOD Assembly: April 29th - May 2nd 2027, Adelaide, Australia

Weaving the Web: 22.-25. July 2027, Herbstein/Fulda, Germany. for more Information, email weaving@obod.org or www.weltderlinden.de/weaving

Social Media

 Facebook:
<https://www.facebook.com/druidry>

 TikTok:
<https://www.tiktok.com/@oboddruidry>

 Instagram:
<https://www.instagram.com/oboddruidry>

 Threads:
<https://www.threads.com/@oboddruidry>

Phenology Wheel: August by Alison Kirkham

