



TOUCHSTONE

— The journal of —



THE ORDER OF BARDS OVATES & DRUIDS

September 2026 | Issue 349

This Issue



Elen of the Ways by nemie



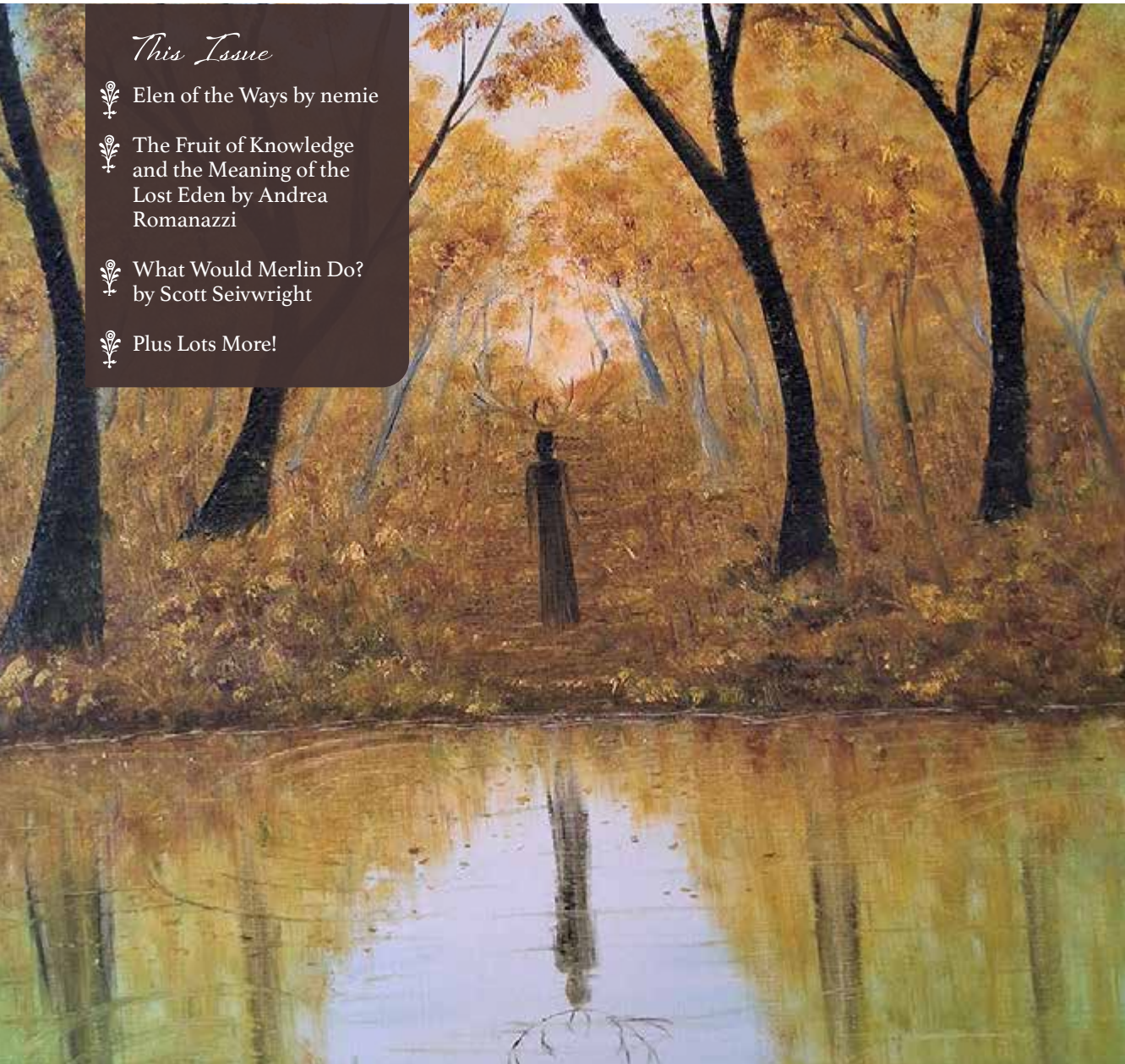
The Fruit of Knowledge
and the Meaning of the
Lost Eden by Andrea
Romanazzi



What Would Merlin Do?
by Scott Seivwright



Plus Lots More!



Cover: "Elen of the Ways" by nemie

Editorial

Welcome to September's *Touchstone* - and a bounteous harvest awaits you!

There are some fantastic articles in this month's edition. Andrea Romanazzi's piece on the symbolism of apples is perfect for Alban Elfed. There is also an important piece about the impact of AI by Scott Seivwright and we take a creative walk in the autumn woodland with Bob Eakes. Bob actually sent his piece to me back in 2024, proving that I never throw anything away and just wait for it to find its place!

There's also a hedgerow full of poetry, replete with glistening berries of inspiration

My guest this month on *Touchstone Unbound* is nemie, who has written about Elen of the Ways. Elen also steps out of the autumnal forest in nemie's wonderful artwork on the front cover. Come along to our next gathering on *The Hearth* on Friday 4th September at 7pm UK time.

On the subject of deer gods, Herne shakes his antlers in my *Bit at the Back* this month!

And so, as we ease ourselves towards the equinox, in the hope that the heat from this summer will soon begin to mellow, grab a cup of tea (or something cooler, if we are having yet another heatwave) and join us as we take a gentle stroll through the turning of the year.



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"Settling Down" by Essy Thorn

Pinkening pastels cascade into violet.
Day and night are playing nice and they're
sharing the sky,
Evening the scales so their weights are aligning.
Rays of light will say goodnight as they're fading
from sight.
As green turns into red, orange, yellow, then
brown,
The leaves begin descending toward the wel-
coming ground.
Let's reap what we've been tending for our
festival now
As we get ready for settling down.



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Farm, London Rd, Bolney. RH17 5PX
Email: office@druidry.org
Phone UK: +44 1273 470888
Phone US: +1 (857) 293-6468

MEMBERSHIP ENQUIRIES: Please contact Lena
and Jo at the office address above.

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Pendragon's Bit

As our wonderful Chosen Chief takes a well-deserved break, here's a bit from your Pendragon.

Just prior to and during Lughnasadh, I was lucky enough to join the Bardic Grade Gorsedd in North Wales and the Mount Thunder Druidencamp in the Celtic forests of Germany. As ever it is such a privilege to meet up with old friends and new, and spend time with members of our extraordinary community.

Together, in good company, we have been exploring themes of wisdom, inspiration and connection; yet doing so as our (northern hemisphere) world burns.

Having worked hard to reconnect with the natural world, to listen with all our senses, with our light body, the sound of its suffering is very loud: animals, plants and trees struggling in the extreme heat, widespread crop failures and huge wildfires. All this as the fossil fuel companies report record profits. The sickness of humanity – putting profit today, before a liveable future tomorrow. I think the fossil fuel companies should buy us all solar panels and Air Conditioning units!

Yet in my anger and frustration, and as I check my apple orchards, I recall the sound of Awens drifting down the forest paths of the Mount Thunder Druidencamp. There I asked the question 'where is our Inspiration?' and I did a romp through history. We are inspired by, amongst other things, cave art, stone monuments, pre-Christian philosophy, Celtic art, myths and legends and, of course, Philip Carr-Gomm and Eimear Burke.

One of the connections was story-telling, imagining our ancestors telling stories by the light of flickering flames in front of image strewn cave walls, right through to Eimear's fire-side chats in our modern digital world. That ancient impulse to tell stories and to listen with all our attention to great story tellers.

There was also the theme of *Knowing Thyself*, a phrase written on the walls at Delphi, and thought to be the beginning of all wisdom. And here we are two thousand years later with this fusion of Celtic Spirituality and Psychosynthesis, literally picking up where our ancestors left off.

However, the one answer I may have missed was being inspired by our community. OBOD, as a community of people who have studied or are studying the Gwersu, is reliant on the energy of its members to provide opportunities for the commu-

nity to come together, whether it's the Gatherings, the Ritual Workshops, the Groves or the Gorseddau.

All these things require someone to put their energy into creating space – to see if we can find another way of being, another way of living our lives. To those people I say 'thank you' for the time you devote to OBOD and for giving us the opportunity to be inspired together.

Hearing other people chanting Awens somewhere is a profound experience – it touches the heart. To hear Awens floating through a forest is so wonderful. So as the year 2026 heads into its maturity at Alban Elfed and we reflect on our lives and our lands, perhaps we should recall that when Merlin was driven mad by the insanity of battle, he fled into the forest to recover his sanity. Maybe humanity can heal its sickness if more of us spend a bit more time in the forest?

Alles gut. Blessings of the Season.
Gwalchwen.

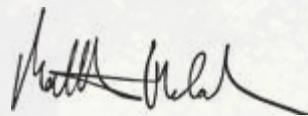


Image: Cerid at the Mt Thunder Druidencamp, after the Corn Dolly workshop led by Mrs Pendragon.

Fall by Jessica McGee

We welcome the cool
as the rains of Fall begin
and the trees go bright.





Orange on the Branch by Eik Hjarta

Looking out my window, I see
a single fruit, burning softly -
orange upon the bending tree,
a lantern lit for what will be.

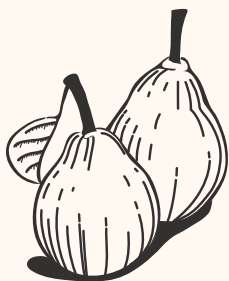
The air is restless, charged, alive,
whispers coil, the currents thrive;
a turning stirs beneath the ground,
old songs awaken, without sound.

The green gives way to amber flame,
a timeless wheel that speaks no name.
Spring's bright laughter, Summer's crown,
now bow to Autumn, settling down.

So too the body bends with years,
harvest ripens through joy and tears;
youth once budded, wild and free,
now fruiting wisdom on the tree.

Each cycle ends, yet none is lost,
new paths are carved, old bridges crossed.
For every leaf that dares to fall
the seed remembers, through it all.

And in the hush of cooling skies,
a magic hum begins to rise -
the breath of change, both fierce and kind,
a season turning, soul aligned.



On a Summer Night's Rain by Jessica McGee

The scent of jasmine
pierces the summer night's rain
blessing the moment.

Altar Poppies by Joshua Ramey-Renk

Bold bright California Orange
Folding with sunsets
Unfurling in the window-framed sunrise
Drinking moonwater from repurposed spice-
jar vases

Outside, their sisters
Reaching for the same sun
Curl up to the same fading sky

Holding the comforting message
Cut for offering or left in the soil
We all yearn for the same light
We will all rest in the same last embrace



Copper Earth by Jo-animist

Beside the open copper earth
Of tree root, leaves from autumn's last
Of generational plantain
and grass

Feathers emerge in glints of light
Beneath the hedgerow swing
Charcoal blend with stone
and russet wing

Amber edge, silver etched
Merge with sun and ground
Layers of oat,
puffed chest mound

Within the copper earth,
Becoming woodland heath
The fledging hides from view
The oracle, bequeathed



Image: Hare and the Moon by Maryanne Mattson#
 “I am a strange language”

Water by Maca Smith

The Moon reflected on a puddle.
 A school of leaping fish.
 Rivers and rivers of tears.
 The erotic Sea.
 Euphoria under torrential rain.
 A memorable lake.

Water, what feels our pain.

Jaguar by Caroline Malim

I am Jaguar,
 Dark as velvet night.
 Mine is the sharp obsidian blade,
 And still, black mirror pool devoid of starry
 light.
 I see into darkness
 All hidden mine to know.
 For I am the shadow walker where others fear
 to go!
 Do not touch or ask of me
 ‘Less you can pay my price.
 I speak to those who stop their dread
 Then own their sacrifice.

As I Wonder by Matthew Maria

As I wonder
 In a dappled light
 Leaves unfurl

As I wander
 In a pebbled stream
 Currents swirl

As I wonder
 In a tallow light
 I sense a hallowed truth

As I wander
 In a meandering dream
 I catch a glimpse of you



Treehugger by Ricky Gellissen

Be it Oak , or Ash, or Old Yew Tree
 I have embraced them all, intimately.
 I’m not an arboreal-obsessed kinky bugger.
 I’m a dirt-worshipping tree-hugger:
 That’s how I define my Druidry

Twigs and Leaves by Carla Righetti

At sunset I was walking 'long
an old wild path in Galway Wood
I had with me my stick so strong,
and my warmest cloak with hood.
The atmosphere was magical,
and dreamy enough to make me lose
myself among the ancient trees,
yet I did not drink any booze...!

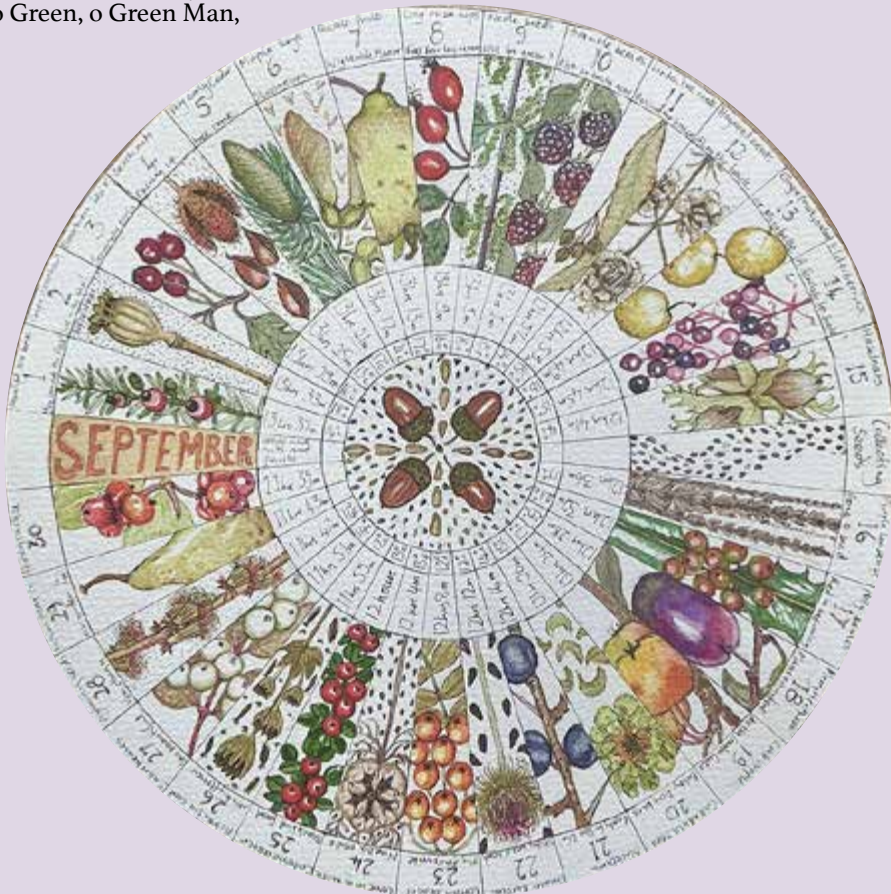
O Green, o Green, o Green Man,
it seems to me I saw your face
among the rocks and mossy trees
I turned my head to that mystery,
but there were only twigs and leaves...

Thin streams were singing melodies
in the timeless place of greenery
when suddenly I felt I was not alone
in that awesome dreamery...
I seized a fleeting flicker, gosh!
to the left behind a fallen trunk
was it a creepy, leery animal
who sneaked towards its cozy bunk?
O Green, o Green, o Green Man,

it seems to me I saw your face
among the rocks and mossy trees
I turned my head to that mystery
but there were only twigs and leaves...!

Were those words I think I heard out there,
whispering of speechless mysteries,
or only just the rustling of the leaves
in the autumn twilight breeze?
Were those eyes I caught peepin' at me,
winking wary among the branches,
or perhaps only a trick of light
making fun of my flawed senses?

O Green, o Green, o Green Man
It seems to me I saw your face
among the rocks and mossy trees
I turned my head, this time no joke!
But, once again...only twigs and leaves!



Phenology Wheel: September: by Alison Kirkham

Bardic Tales

WOW, You Don't Say by Bob Eakes

I was walking down the mountain road with a canopy of trees above me.

I was thinking that perhaps I would sit down against the trunk of one of the trees and just take a break.

I thought I had chosen a tree partially down the covered veil, but I decided to go back to a different tree. Its trunk kind of made a little seat and so I sat myself down.

I sat there in the quiet, inhaling the fragrance of the trees and I started to drift off into kind of somnolence.

I listened to the breeze as it fluttered through the leaves of the forest, the birds singing, the chattering of some squirrels and I was at peace.

Kind of to myself I asked "I wonder what the trees think".

And a low voice said "What do you want to know?"

I was a little shocked, and I thought about it a moment, and I said "Tell me of your history."

"Well for the trees, that's a long story. Do you want me to start from a seed?"

"No," I said "how about the history of the overhanging trees with the road that I was walking through when I came here."

"Fine story" said the tree.

"Well" said the tree, "we all grew up together, so I'm older than others, and younger than others, but we grew into this forest our branches coming together above and we were happy."

"People would come through our forest and we were happy to have them come by."

"Some stopped by for a while others just passed through."

"Eventually, more and more people passed through,

and apparently they decided to build the road to make it easier for them to pass."

The tree said "We miss our friends."

"They cut this road through our forest with our branches, forming an arch above the road and so more and more people passed through on the new road."

"Sometimes they would just hurry through."

"Sometimes they would stop for a while like yourself."

"Sometimes lovers would stay a while and carve their names or initials on our trunks. We didn't mind that so much because it made us love trees and we hold their names and the memory of them, as a sacred trust."

"Sometimes they would come back at various stages of their lives and touch our bark and the names there and remember when it was made, and remember their loves then and now, sometimes in happiness, joy, sometimes in sadness at their loves who has passed."

"We understood the latter, because we have sadness when we think about the trees that have passed."

The rain started to fall and my tree bent its leaves and branches and covered me to keep me dry.

I fell asleep, listening to the power of the rain and the rustling of the leaves.

I awoke later, to the sound of the squirrels chirping, and the leaves rustling and the feel of the sun on my face shining through a hole in the canopy.

I stretched and stood and turned to the tree wrapping my arms around it and giving it my thanks.

I took a small bead bracelet from my arm and put it upon a branch, and offered the tree some tobacco, and gave what blessing I could to the tree and to the grove.

As I walked away through the group of trees, it appeared that the trees gave a slight bow.



The Fruit of Knowledge and the Meaning of the Lost Eden

by Andrea Romanazzi

Among the most powerful images in humanity's spiritual history is that of the lost garden. From the biblical Eden to the immortal fields of the Celtic Otherworld, from Idunn's apples in the Norse tradition to the golden fruits guarded by the Hesperides in Greek mythology, cultures distant in time and space seem to share the same intuition: the existence of an original state of harmony from which humanity has moved away.

Yet a deeper reading of these stories suggests a different perspective. Paradise is not simply a place lost in the past, but an inner condition that can be regained only through a path of transformation and knowledge. This interpretation emerges clearly when we compare some of the most important European myths linked to the symbolism of the tree, the fruit, and immortality. In all these stories, the real theme is not remaining in Eden but leaving it. Not preserving innocence, but gaining awareness.

The biblical account is probably the best-known starting point. In the Book of Genesis, Adam and Eve live in the Garden of Eden in perfect communion with God and creation. They know neither suffering, labour, nor death. Yet this paradise has one essential feature: the absence of the knowledge of good and evil. Humanity lives in a state of innocence that may be described as pre-reflective. It neither chooses, understands, nor distinguishes. The decisive moment comes with the eating of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. In Western tradition this fruit has been identified with an apple, although the biblical text never says so. From that moment Adam and Eve's eyes are opened. They become aware of their nakedness, their individuality, and their human condition. This episode has traditionally been interpreted as the Fall, but it may also be seen as a beginning.

A remarkably similar idea appears in Greek mythology. In the Garden of the Hesperides grow the golden apples given by Gaia to Hera on her

marriage to Zeus. These fruits grant immortality and are guarded by nymphs and the immortal dragon Ladon. To obtain them, Heracles must complete one of his greatest labours through trials, suffering, and transformation. The hero is not born worthy of the golden apples; he becomes worthy through his journey. Once again, the symbolic message is clear. Spiritual immortality is not an original condition but a goal. Humanity must cross the world, face monsters, mistakes, and hardships before reaching the sacred garden.



A similar pattern appears in the Norse tradition through the goddess Idunn (Iðunn), guardian of the apples of

eternal youth, without which the gods of Ásgarðr would grow old and lose their strength. According to the myth, she is the wife of Bragi, the god of poetry and eloquence. This is no coincidence: in Norse culture, wisdom and renewal are closely connected. The myth carries a profound meaning. Divine youth is not automatic or permanent. Even the gods must nourish themselves with the symbol of regeneration. Spiritual life is not a static state but a continuous process of rebirth.

In the Celtic world, however, the symbolism of the apple perhaps reaches its highest expression. The best-known example is Avalon, whose name probably derives from the Welsh word *afal*, meaning "apple." Avalon is the Isle of Apples, where King Arthur is taken after the final battle of Camlann. Its most remarkable feature is that it does not belong to the past. It is not a lost paradise but a hidden place beyond the veil of the ordinary world. It still exists, yet it cannot be reached by ordinary means. Medieval sources describe Avalon as a land of healing, abundance, and knowledge. Time flows differently there. Illness is absent. Wounds are healed. It is not simply a geographical island but a state of being.

The same symbolism appears in the Irish tale of Connla. One day a woman from the Otherworld offers the young man a wonderful apple. For an entire month Connla feeds only on that fruit,

which never becomes smaller. In the end he follows the mysterious visitor across the sea and disappears from the world of men. Connla's apple does not bring about a fall but an awakening. It creates a longing for the Otherworld. Once he has tasted it, ordinary reality is no longer enough.

A final example is the later fairy tale of Snow White, an extraordinary example of how an ancient symbol survived in European folklore, changing from an emblem of knowledge and immortality into an instrument of apparent death and rebirth. The version known today comes from the Brothers Grimm, who published Snow White in 1812 in their *Children's and Household Tales*. The Grimms, however, did not invent the story. They collected tales transmitted orally for centuries in the German countryside, revising and harmonising them. The tale is therefore much older than the nineteenth century and preserves many elements of the religious beliefs and imagination of pre-Christian Europe.

Once again, it is the bite of the "forbidden" apple that changes the heroine's life. She tastes the fruit and falls into a sleep like death. She is placed in a crystal coffin, from which she awakens only later. This sequence is not simply an attempted murder but follows an initiatory pattern found in many ancient traditions: entry into a new state of being requires a symbolic death. The apple does not truly kill Snow White; it suspends her existence, ends her childhood, and places her between life and death. Only after this passage can she be reborn and enter a new stage of life.

For this reason, many scholars of symbolism, including Carl Gustav Jung and Marie-Louise von Franz, have interpreted Snow White's apple not as a simple narrative device but as an archetype of inner transformation. Although presented as a children's tale, it still tells one of the oldest truths of the European tradition: there is no rebirth without a symbolic death, and every true form of knowledge requires leaving behind the previous condition.

From this perspective, Snow White becomes the final link in a long chain connecting the Garden of Eden, Idunn's apples, the orchard of the Hesperides, and the Isle of Avalon. The ages and languages change, but the symbol remains

remarkably constant: the apple is the fruit of transformation. Whoever takes it never returns unchanged.

In this light, we should reconsider the meaning of Eden, not simply as a place to mourn or an irreparable loss, but as the starting point of life's initiatory journey. This is the deepest meaning of the symbolism of the golden apples found throughout the ancient traditions of Europe, a symbolism that still fascinates us today.

Eden, therefore, is not simply behind us. It does not belong only to a mythical, unreachable, and forever lost past. If that were so, all the great stories of humanity would be nothing more than elegies of nostalgia, memories of a vanished Golden Age.

The myths tell something different. They do not merely describe a lost paradise; they always tell of a journey. Adam and Eve do not remain in the garden but are driven out and must face work, suffering, responsibility, and death. Heracles does not receive the apples of the Hesperides as a gift but must earn them by overcoming one of the greatest trials of his life. Arthur reaches Avalon only after fighting, ruling, suffering, and seeing his kingdom fall.

Humanity is born in unawareness. Like a child protected by infancy, it first inhabits a kind of natural Eden where everything is given without understanding. But this innocence is not yet wisdom. It is an unconscious fullness destined to disappear. Only by confronting limits, suffering, error, and death does the human being develop the awareness that no original paradise could ever provide.

The search for Paradise is therefore not a return to spiritual childhood, for no one can truly return. It is the journey itself that permanently transforms the one who undertakes it.



Elen of the Ways by nemie

As elusive as the woodland deer, Elen of the Ways is a figure who inhabits the edges of the mythic and ancient landscape, the memory of the forests which once cloaked these lands. An Antlered Goddess, from the hinterland of history, she leads a pathway through time, the mesolithic tracks our ancestors walked as, for millennia they followed the reindeer herds as the seasons turned.

Elen, often described as the Green Woman of the Woods, is a mysterious figure, antler crowned, she walks just beyond folklore, in the leafy shadows of our imagination. Perhaps we may catch the turn of her head, the whisper of her footstep, or the flash of her cloak in the breeze as winter melts into the green of spring, or summer bows to autumn's rich reds and golds.

I don't remember when she stepped fully formed into my imagination, but she's been there for a long time, watching from the deepest dark of the woods. As I passed from Ovate to Druid, a dark figure who had been slowly materialising through the trees, stepped into the sunlight, she became a woman in white, antler crowned, gown shimmering with iridescent light; it was Elen herself, welcoming me into the Ancient Grove of the Druids, from the depths of a very ancient memory, of millennia passed within the forests.

Elen is a Goddess we have to piece together from the space she leaves in the pantheon of Goddess and Gods. She comes from a time when ancient people depended upon the deer for survival, the meat that sustained them, the antlers and bones they crafted into tools, the skins that protected them from the elements. Following the herd was as vital as life itself.

As a female figure bearing antlers, Elen can be associated with the vast herds of Reindeer that once traversed the vast Taiga forests of our Planet, the deer known in northern Americas as

the Caribou, for this is the only species of deer whose females are antlered.

Reindeer antler 'headpieces', have been found in the mysterious Starr Carr settlement. More than 20 of these have been discovered in north Yorkshire, deposited in a place that was, 11 thousand years ago, a woodland lake, where mesolithic people stopped. Generation after generation, over a time span 800 years, carved antler hunting tools and create these enigmatic 'antler crowns'.

For me she is less the Goddess of the hunt, Artemis, or Diana, more the Lady of the Beasts, Kebele, or the Ephesian Artemis. She is the Mother of Animals, the Leader of the ribbon of life. She comes from the all providing depths of Mother Earth herself, from the cave-wombs of modern day Spain and France where ancient people painted an almost living representation of the creatures who ruled their landscapes and lives.



The Welsh princess, Elen Luyddog (Elen of the Hosts) is remembered in *The Mabinogi*, in the Dream of the Emperor Maxen, Macsen Wledig, written in the *The White Book of Rhydderch*. Placed by historians in the 4th century, she was the daughter of Eudaf/Eudwy, a North Wales chieftain, probably ruling an area close to Roman Segontium, present day Caernarfon. After Macsen/Maxen falls in love with her in a dream, he seeks her out, and she lends him her blessing, perhaps as the Sovereign Lady of the Land. She inspires roads to be built across her realm, so it can be defended from attack.

Today these roads are known as Sarn Helen, a ribbon of ancient tracks, traversing Wales, from Caernarfon to the South, in part following the course of Afon Conwy, the Chief River of north Wales. Many Welsh Roman roads are attributed to Elen, despite the fact that her time postdates their construction. Some of these are more an-

cient tracks, which may have been co-opted by occupying forces, before receiving the patronage of St Elen, saint of roadbuilders, and protector-ess of travellers.

Perhaps it is fitting for an elusive Deer Goddess that there is some confusion, connection, or maybe conflation with Helena, mother of the Roman Emperor Constantine, known for her pilgrimage to the Holy Land, where she sought the places and relics of the Early Christians. Two creative British Historians of the Early middle ages, Henry of Huntingdon and Geoffrey of Monmouth, wrote that Helena was a Briton, daughter of Old King Cole of Colchester, who, in a bid for peace between Briton and Rome was wed to Constantius, emperor of Rome for one year, 305 to 306, before dying in York and passing the baton of power to his son, Constantine. Their conflation may originate from Sozomen's 5th century *Historia Ecclesiastica*, who recorded that Constantine 'began' when he was converted to Christianity in Britain. There are least twenty-five existing holy wells in the British Isles dedicated to a Saint Helen, perhaps some of these were once watering places sacred to the

Deer Goddess

I don't know if the Deer Lady of Native American culture can be connected to Elen (she has deer hooves, not antlers) but she does represent a protective figure for girls and women, defending those who have been mistreated.

Elen is wild. She freely walks the animal paths of woods and forests, meadows, and hillsides, she is in the hedges and grass verges, hiding in the trees beside the roads and motorways, and wild corners where the foxes explore the dark of night. From her footprints grow wild grasses, dandelions and thistles, where beetles and bees, butterflies and birds find shelter. Look for her in the forgotten green places, the spaces where Nature reclaims with wild saplings, ivy and moss.

The figure of an antlered crowned woman is seeping into popular culture. She is wild, free, a little transgressant, as she travels through the edges of this world. May you catch a glimpse of her in the wilderness, wherever you find it. I sense her watching, waiting, bringing freedom with her pasing footsteps.



Image: Elen Leading us into the Dark Half of the Year by nemie

What Would Merlin Do? by Scott Seivwright

"I have been many things," says Taliesin — a word in letters, a blaze on a hill, an eagle, a coracle on the sea. The bard claims to have stood at every turning of the world, carrying wisdom across each threshold so it would not be lost in the burning.

I think of him now, because I believe we are standing at such a turning. Not a small change, not another gadget — something larger is moving beneath us and, as always, we cannot yet see the true shape of the age we are entering. Those who lived through the advent of the printing press, the railways, electricity, the internet — none fully understood the world they were walking into. We are no different. So let me begin in the old way, with a confession.

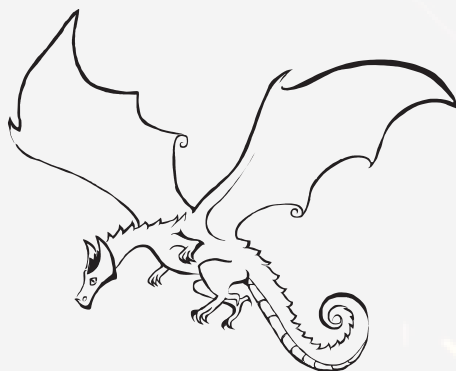
I use artificial intelligence almost every day, and I love what it can do. I have worked around technology and intelligent systems for thirty years; I am not afraid of the fire I am describing. And I will be plain about something personal, because it matters. I am dyslexic and neurodivergent. My mind has always worked a little sideways to the world; there are days it moves too fast for me to catch, days the words are all there but tangled. AI has changed that. It helps me slow the world down, untangle a thought, meet me where I struggle and give me a bridge across the gap. For someone like me, that is not convenience. It is freedom.

But magic always has a price. Every bard knows this. The gift that asks nothing is the one to fear most. Merlin himself, wisest of the wise, was undone by arts he thought he understood. The one who controls the source controls the magician. So the question Merlin would ask of this gold-rush age is not can we build it, but should we, at what scale, at what cost, and who pays?

That last question matters most — because we must distinguish between the tool and the soul. AI can give us access to letters, language, patterns, images, and the vast library of human information. It can help us think and create, and help some of us participate more fully in a world that was not designed for our minds. But it cannot give us

Awen. It can imitate the shape of wisdom. It cannot become wisdom for us. That is still our work.

And beneath the wonder there is a harder truth. Much of this magic is being sold too cheaply, too quickly, too strategically. The great platforms are not offering miracles out of kindness; they are building dependency, making the fire easy to use until we cannot imagine life without it.



We have seen this fire before — the railway mania of the 1840s, fortunes flung at tracks that were never needed and sometimes never laid, landscapes cut open in the name of the future. We are doing something similar now, in steel sheds across our fields and glens. And the figures should stop us: companies have applied to connect around

fifty gigawatts of data centres to the British grid, against independent forecasts of far lower genuine demand by 2050. That is not a plan. That is a bubble — and some of the money's own watchmen are beginning to say so.

The risk is not that AI exists, but that speculative demand is treated as public necessity — infrastructure built not to real social need but to a gold-rush logic: grab land, grab grid, grab subsidy, and let someone else carry the cost. And there are consequences. To cool these machines, some data centres drink astonishing quantities of water. In Ireland, Meta's Clonee campus reportedly withdrew close to a billion litres in a single year, while a nearby facility with different cooling methods used a tiny fraction of that. Water is not an abstract input. It is drinking water, farming water, river health — the quiet assumption every household makes when they turn a tap.

Electricity is no more abstract. Every large data centre asks something of the grid — more cables, more substations, more generation, more cost. The question is not whether it can be built, but who pays. The cost flows outward: into grid charges, public subsidy, bills, and taxation — into the lives of people who never asked for the bargain and may never see the benefit. The poorest pay

hardest; the rural poor pay twice, through rising costs and pressure on the land around them. And often, not one of them was meaningfully asked. Private reward. Public risk. A landgrab dressed as progress.

This is not only about numbers. It is about place. When we build these steel monoliths without care, we do more than strain water and power; we change the character of a place — heat, noise, light, traffic, fencing, and an industrial hum that does not belong everywhere. We disrupt the genius loci, the spirit of the place. A glen has a voice. A field has a memory. A river has a rhythm. Bad infrastructure ignores this. Good infrastructure listens.

And here we must be clear: the answer is not “no technology.” That is too easy, and it is not true. The answer is the right technology, in the right place, at the right scale, for the right purpose, with the right protections. Lean, clean, necessary, accountable — not vast speculative warehouses built because cheap capital, political panic, and corporate ambition briefly aligned. We need AI. But we do not need to sacrifice communities to feed it.

Druids do not see history as a straight line marching upward. We see the wheel turn. I believe we are living through a true turning of that wheel. An age is ending; an age is being born. The machines may be midwives. They may be undertakers. That choice is not theirs. It is ours. The danger is not change. The danger is that we meet a turning of the ages with the smallness of a gold rush: that we grab at magic and forget the only thing worth carrying across a threshold, which is wisdom. AI can be a great tool. It can also become an engine of extraction, dependency, surveillance, and harm — and at its furthest edge, if governed badly, something more dangerous than we can yet imagine. This is why I founded **The Firewalkers**. Not because I hate AI, not because I fear technology, but because I believe people and land should not be sacrificed to speculation, and communities deserve to know what is being built around them, what it will cost, who benefits, and who carries the risk. Gold rushes leave ghost towns. We should remember that.

So why fire? Because to walk through fire takes courage — and the planet is already burning. Ready or not, we are crossing the coals now; the only question is whether we cross with our

wisdom intact. Fire is dangerous, but fire is also sacred. It not only destroys; it transforms. AI is a kind of fire. So we do not flee it. We tend it. We ask what it is for, who it serves, what it consumes, and whether it belongs in this place, at this size. And when it is wrong, we say so — not with panic, but with courage; not against the future, but for a better one.

So I leave you with the question Merlin might ask. When the next application comes for a field, a glen, or a village near you — and it will — will you look away, or will you read the notice? Will you ask who profits and who pays, where the water and the power come from, what public subsidy is involved, and what is left behind if the gold rush moves on? When a community stands its ground, will you lend them your voice? When technology is genuinely useful, will you defend it — and when it is careless or wasteful, will you challenge it?

That is the path. Not anti-AI. Not anti-progress. Anti-carelessness — and pro-land, pro-people, pro-wisdom, pro-future. If something in you stirred at that, you may already be a Firewalker. Come and find us at firewalkers.earth. Bring your fire.



Image by Kaz Leroux

Open Forum

Tales of B-Earth Book I – The Maiden's Tale: Ròn

by Lynn R S Genevieve



After going back to university to study, I realised that the novel I'd begun for my course was in fact the middle of a potential trilogy – and so *Tales of B-Earth* was born. I had the opportunity to follow up my studies at PhD level which supported me to start writing three books. I applied to OBOD for a Doctoral Scholarship award

and was successful. OBOD's Patron Dwina Gibb generously makes this financial award possible for postgraduate students who are pursuing a Phd on the subject of Druidry. I received my Doctor of Fine Arts degree in 2025 for my thesis: *An Autoethnographic Inquiry into the Sources of Inspiration for a Feminist Fantasy Novel: A Druid Author's Experience*.

I can now share the fruits of this fabulously creative time with the publication of *The Maiden's Tale: Ròn*, book I in the *Tales of B-Earth Trilogy*. Book II *The Mother's Tale: MerLina* is with readers prior to the final edit, and book III *The Matriarch's Tale: MerDreda* is in draft.

I give special thanks to the artist Jill Smith, a very special and talented woman, for the cover art. Our paths crossed when I attended an online presentation that Jill gave at the University of Glasgow. Unknowingly I had been coming across Jill's work for years and when I contacted her to tell her about the *Tales of B-Earth*, she shared the amazing synchronicity that one of her pieces of art work from years before was called 'B-Earth' (spelt the same way). It portrayed the Sheela-na-gig of Kilpeck as giving birth to the planet earth. She most generously agreed to let me use this fabulous piece of art for the covers of the trilogy.

The Maidens Tale begins when Cal discovers a baby girl Ròn, born of a seal. Ròn becomes an apprentice B-EarthKeeper to Cal who takes her to the Isle of Elann where the Sisterhood reside. This Neolithic, matriarchal society act as spiritual healers ven-

erating the Great Mother. Ròn is haunted in her dreams. Tragedy strikes and Ròn must escape from the only home she's ever known. And so begins her journey to the south and a new Sisterhood, one that seeks balance in all things.

This fantasy trilogy encompasses themes drawn from my major passions – Druidry and Birth (I am a retired midwife). I believe many of you will enjoy it!

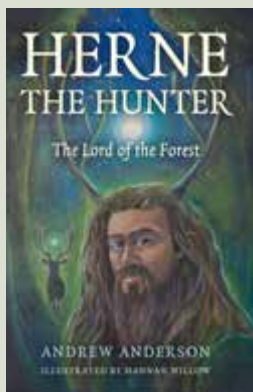
Find Tales of B-Earth Book I - The Maiden's Tale: Ròn on the OBOD store >

Dear Friends,

There's a website now for our international Druid-Magic Festival in Herbstein/Fulda, Germany next year! At druidry-weaving.org you can not only sign up now for the Gathering-Newsletter, but also explore the updates on location, programme and ideas for trips etc. that will be published on a regular basis. Sign up now and get access to special discounts and early information! We're looking forward to your thread in the larger weaving.

In peace and love from under the summerly oaks
your "The Weaving"-Team

Andrew's Bit At The Back



I first met Herne the Hunter in the April 1984 – on Saturday night TV.

Looking back, *Robin of Sherwood*, was a very strange choice for ITV's Saturday tea-time slot. It wasn't simply a tale of derring-do like previous and later series; it was strange and mystical, with mists

swirling over milky streams and an enchanting soundtrack by the group Clannad. Yes, there were skirmishes and scenes of camaraderie; but it was the otherness of the world the series portrays which was so enchanting.

Central to that otherness is the figure of Herne, portrayed by actor John Abineri. He is a complex figure for a show aimed at a family audience; a shaman who is clearly flesh and blood but who, at key points, channels a spirit of the woodland realm. He is often seen in the distance, swamped by a costume of deerskin, including the head and antlers of a stag. His voice echoes between the boughs of the greenwood as he speaks from the otherworld. But far from being terrifying, for young viewers he is a figure of surety, who offers us hope that all will be well. Robin, played by both Michael Praed and Jason Connery, is Herne's son, deeply connected to the forest, the landscape and the people of Britain.

That wasn't the only time Herne the Hunter appeared on my TV screen in 1984. In the run up to Christmas, BBC1 showed a landmark adaptation of John Masfield's novel, *The Box of Delights*. I've written about the impact this show had on me in November 2025's *Touchstone*, as I rewatch every year in the run up to Christmas. Here, Herne is a much warmer figure. Portrayed by Glynn Baker, he is a friendly mentor, dressed in the colours of the forest with a huge mane

of hair. He appears at key points to help Kay Harker (Devin Stanfield) see things more clearly. There is a standout moment, where Herne invites Kay into his wildwood before they transform in a way not too dissimilar to the chase between Cerridwen and Taliesin. Herne even arrives in a sleigh on Christmas Eve, helping to save Christmas for a Kay and his friends who have become stuck in snow drifts.

And so, for me, Herne became both the lord of the greenwood and the saviour of midwinter. As I grew up, he receded in my memory, but I always felt I knew who he was. Imagine my surprise, then, when I found out that I didn't know him at all!

In early 2022, Herne seemed to reach out to me again. I had finished one book and was wondering what I could write about next. Suddenly, Herne was everywhere – on tv, in the books I picked up. I even bought myself a set of Herne the Hunter prayer beads! As I sat in my room, overlooking Shakespeare's Birthplace in Stratford-upon-Avon, I decided to do a little bit of research, only to find out that the first record of Herne the Hunter is in Shakespeare's play *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. It was if the final piece of the puzzle clicked into place – not only was Herne everywhere around me but I literally lived over the road from the birthplace of the man who first wrote down his name.

What I found was that Herne was a far more complex figure than I had realised. He has been a figure of fun, of punishment, of infernal intent, as well as a ghost, a monster and the lord of the trees. I got the opportunity to revisit the Hernes of 1984 and fell in love with them all over again, as well as finding other versions of him I had never heard of before. Herne is now a less defined figure in my inner world and yet I feel I know him a lot better. If you fancy joining me on that journey of discovery, my book, [Herne the Hunter](#), is now available on the [OBOD store](#) >

Until
next time,

Andrew iii



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

Bardic Grade Gorsedd: 6 - 8 August 2027. *Taliesin and Amergin: Sparking Fire in the Head* with Penny Billington. Noddfa, Penmaenmawr, Wales. Email Tom at: bardicgorsedds@obod.org

Kernow Druid Grade Gorsedd: 5-7 March 2027. For more info. email druidgorsedds@obod.org

Tettenhall Druid Grade Gorsedd: 2-4 April 2027, Wolverhampton. For more info, 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



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



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Universal light, love, blesses me always.

May I use its energy, radiate it in my world.

Let all people come to realise the transforming power of the light and love of the universe, and rely upon its patterns in their relations with one another.

May all come to kindness, for themselves and for each other.

The power of universal love and light is a blessing in the flows of the season, a blessing for my tree, bringing apples and bright, then fading, leaf colour.

I am blessed.

May we all know we are blessed.

*Poem: Autumn Blessing
by Debbie Lawther*