



TOUCHSTONE

The journal of



THE ORDER OF BARDS OVATES & DRUIDS

October 2026 | Issue 350

This Issue

- ✿ Befriending the Local Corvids by Morgan Hollett
- ✿ Radical Rituals for Samhuinn by Mark Newton
- ✿ Beyond the Mists of Exile to Reunite with the Whole by Dr Alberto Fragasso
- ✿ Plus Lots More!



Cover: "Samhain Mooncrow" by Cathy Johnson

On the Cover

"Crows have always meant something special to me, something ancient and magical. One of my earliest memories is my dad telling me about the pet crow he had when he was a little boy. He taught it to speak; he didn't split its tongue or anything like that, he simply had a way with creatures other than human, and I envy him to this day. Every fall when the corn has been harvested and the trees are nearly bare, I remember walking across the fields with him, the smell of harvest and wood smoke in the air, crows calling overhead, beagles tumbling joyously around our feet, barking at the noisy birds. I swear, the crows were teasing them, diving and swooping and hurling imprecations, then laughing at the hounds' consternation.

When I made my first drum one Leap Year day, I sat outdoors near my little fire with my tools spread out around me; honeybee, Canada goose, and crow came near to bless it. I still feel them close by each morning when I drum, many years later. I know people who have reciprocal relationships with crows. They leave them corn and other treats, and the crows return with shiny presents in exchange...buttons, keys, bits of foil, found objects. I've always wished that I could barter with them like that, but my place is too wooded. They prefer fields and open places with cover nearby, so my relationship with these intelligent birds remains the gift in and of itself."

By Cathy Johnson

TOUCHSTONE (October '26 - Issue 350)

- 2 Chosen Chief's Bit
- 3 Bard's Page
- 5 Radical Rituals for Samhuinn - *Mark Newton*
- 6 Bardic Tales: Love Letter to the Jay - *Karen Allen*
- 7 Murder, She Fed: Befriending the Local Corvids - *Morgan Hollett*
- 9 Beyond the Mists of Exile to Reunite with the Whole - *Dr Alberto Fragasso*
- 11 The Alchemy of Shadow - *Dasyre Sires*
- 13 Reviews
- 14 Andrew's Bit at the Back
- 15 Events

"The Memory" by Essy Thorn

I pace through the cemet'ry
Embraced in the memory
Of they who lamentably
Were taken or went from me.
I'm grateful
For their presence when it was lent to me
I can't begin to describe just
how much they meant to me.
I attempt to speak
with them every now and then
At Samhain when
The witches say the shroud is thin.
Make a plate of their favorites and leave it out
for them
Then light a sacred flame and say their name
aloud again.

TOUCHSTONE is published by OBOD.

OBOD OFFICE ADDRESS: Unit 1, Highlands 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.

TOUCHSTONE SUBMISSIONS:

To the editor: Andrew Anderson.

Email: touchstone@druidry.org

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. Articles of 1,400 words or fewer. No AI generated content. Deadline for events inclusion is 1st of the month before publication. Submissions may be printed on the OBOD website unless requested otherwise.

CIRCLE FORUM BOARDS:

<https://hearth.druidry.org/circles/>

MENTORS: for all enquiries about mentors please email Mentors@druidry.org (members only)

LISTINGS OF SEED GROUPS & GROVES:

<https://hearth.druidry.org/seed-groups-groves>

FIND BOOKS, gifts and jewellery online at OBOD's marketplace: store.druidry.org

Chosen Chief's Bit

Bandia dhaoibh go léir! Greetings everyone!

Beannachtaí an Fómhair daoibh! Autumn (Harvest) blessings to you!

I am writing this before the Equinox, and the temperatures here are still in the early 20s. I have a sense of summer hanging on by a thread, for which I am most grateful. There is an old Irish proverb: *Autumn days come quickly, like the running of the hound upon the moor*. I always find the transition into September difficult because we are leaving the light half of the year behind, but once we pass the Equinox I am ok and ready to enter the dark of winter.

Here in Ireland we have three harvest months: August, September and October. In Irish, they are *Lughnasadh*, *Meán Fómhair* and *Deireadh Fómhair*: each of these names refers to the harvest. *Lughnasadh* although named after the God Lugh, he asked that his foster mother Tailltiu (who sacrificed her life to clear the land so the people could grow food) be honoured at this time of early harvest. *Meán Fómhair* means Middle Harvest, and *Deireadh Fómhair* means Last Harvest.

I'd like to share some traditional folk cures. Many of these cures I found in *Ancient Cures, Charms and Usages of Ireland: Contributions to Irish Lore* by Lady Wilde (Oscar Wilde's Mother). While I find these cures and charms very interesting, I am not suggesting you try them. They are for your information and interest only.

In Irish mythology, Diancécht, Chief physician of the Tuatha Dé Danann, was also known as the father of medicine in Ireland. The recipe for Diancécht's porridge has been handed down for generations, for relief of ailments of the body, for example, colds, phlegm, sore throats, and parasites. It consists of hazel-buds, dandelion, chickweed, wood sorrel, and oatmeal; add some water and boil together. I discovered this recipe during the spring, and I added honey and made flapjacks rather than a porridge.

According to Diancécht, there are fourteen disorders of the stomach, for which he gave recipes consisting mostly of plants and herbs. One

interesting one was a potion of roots of alder and apple trees that grow downward into the earth. The roots were to be boiled with the brains of a wild hog and to be drunk fasting until the "bewitched person cast up the evil thing; that was in the stomach."

Vervain, one of the sacred herbs in Ireland, was to be gathered at the rising of the Dog Star when neither sun nor moon were in the sky, following an offering of fruit and honey to the earth. It was believed that Vervain could cure fevers, eradicate poison and offer protection against poisoning to whoever held it.

Vervain and Rowan were considered to offer the best protections for cattle against witchcraft. Branches were tied around the cow's horns and tail, ensuring no fairy or witch could do any harm while the herbs of power were around her.



Spiders were considered very effective cures. A few tied up in a bag and worn around the neck were believed to prevent fever and ague. Only the fairy doctor was

permitted to open the bag to inspect the contents; otherwise the charm would be broken. Another cure was where a small living spider was rolled up in a cobweb, then put into a lump of butter and eaten during the fever. Pills could be made of cobwebs containing spider eggs and taken for three days, after which the treatment had to be stopped. Spider's web was also used to stop bleeding.

Madness could be cured by giving the person three substances not procured by human means and not made by the hand of man. These were honey, milk and salt, which were given to the patient to drink before sunrise in a seashell. Here is one I love: Nine handfuls of mountain moss, dried on a pan to powder. Nine pinches of it, and nine pinches of ashes from the hearth, to be mixed in whey, taken every Tuesday and Thursday. This was a cure for inflammation.

Go maire síocháin in ár gcroíthe le teacht an dorchadais. May there be peace in our hearts as the darkness approaches. Go raibh amhlaidh!

Eimear



Bard's Page

The Woman by Victoria Hiscock

The witch is the woman, wily and wild
The witch is the temper, not tame nor mild
The witch is the darkness in the dead of night
The witch is the shadow formed in moonlight

The muse is the woman, mysterious and free
The muse is the poem formed in symmetry
The muse is the temple of inspired souls
The muse is both ends of everything whole

The siren is the woman, unforgiving and true
The siren is the fever dream taking over you
The siren is the tempest, on the calmest of seas
The siren is the name carried on the breeze

The goddess is the woman, mother, maiden, crone
The goddess is the hearth, the womb is our home
The goddess is the forest, the ocean and the sky
The goddess is the answer, the goddess is our why



Samhuinn by Jessica McGee

Spirits come alive
of those who are and are not
as the great veil thins.

Shapeshifting by Ricky Gellissen

The first time that I ever tried
Shapeshifting, it hurt, and I cried
It was not easy
Made me feel queasy
And left me all furry inside!?

Three Witch Trees by Jon Wingrave

Three witch trees stand on a blasted heath;
Rowan, Hawthorn, Elder,
magic, mischief, mystery,
Maiden, Mother, Crone.

Mountain Ash on mountainside,
lonely beauty Rowan.
In wind and storm and tempest,
bending but not breaking,
abiding without lament.
Brave, beautiful, bountiful,
garlanded with flowers and berries.
Guardian of my grove,
beside the stream and waterfall,
she waves her magic wand.

Hawthorn, May Queen, Mother Earth,
Herald of the Spring.
April can be hard
but summer always sings,
of frothing white blossoms,
yellow buttercups and Faerie rings.
I've witnessed with my eyes
your magic powers,
to keep on keeping on.
The creeping ivy will not win.

My memory of the Elder is partial and dim,
flickering like an old silent film,
or sleep broken dreaming.
All I recall are her branches,
crooked, snagging, snaking,
ancient, grey and grim.
My fortune told in crunching ice,
life lines twisted and broken,
runes, twigs, stones,
cards shuffled and still unturned.

Three witch trees stand on a purple heath;
Rowan, Hawthorn, Elder,
magic, mischief, mystery,
Maiden, Mother, Crone.



Forest by Matthew Maria

Roots reach out
Above the ground
Like the veins of the hands
That once held mine

A fallen leaf spins
On the finest of thread
As birds feed freely
On broken bread

From a shallow scrape
A nightjar calls
As it invites you to listen
To its mysteries and its lore

Tranquil limbs
And leaves of velvet green
Weave their magic
In this forest scene.

Coppice of Birds by Jo-animist

Ribbons of mauve, cornflower, fuchsia
Circle my beloved laid in the circle
Gently on a bed of violet flowers
Calling your name on the hour
Coppice of birds unison lift
Carry our love as you drift
Skyward collecting your ribbons of peace
Farewell kindred spirit you are released.

The Mocking Bird by Jessica McGee

When the moon is high
the lonely mockingbird calls.
Love songs fill the night.



Phenology Wheel: October by Alison Kirkham

Radical Rituals for Samhuinn by Mark Newton

Even the doubters must now have seen the effect of man-made climate change. We've seen some of the driest, hottest spells on record; fires where there ought not to be; trees dying before their time.

Come winter it's likely we'll see wetter, stormier conditions as the locked-up heat finds new and more inconvenient ways to release itself at the hands of Gaia, or whichever Earth Goddess we follow.

Many of us must feel a sense of helplessness. Our own private rituals and respect for the land feel so personal, not broad enough, that they can only get us so far.

I propose that the Wheel of the Year, even the Coligny Calendar, can be calibrated around a more active participation. A Radical Wheel, applied with creativity and determination.

What better time to begin than the beginning, or ending, that is Samhuinn.

Naturally it is a time of ancestral work, an incursion of the spirit realm into ours; we let the dead in. There is perhaps too much to mourn for what has been lost environmentally, so much dead at our hands, and yes, we must own this and integrate it into our rituals. In the Coligny reckoning we approach the fall of the seed. Rebirth, to my mind.

And here is why the Radical Wheel begins in the dark rather than ending there: the seed has to fall, has to look dead and buried, before anything can grow. The death-gate is the starting gate.

With that in mind, Samhuinn is the ideal period for radical acts that assist the Earth Goddess, and let the tree be our map for the climb, root to canopy. New habits, new beginnings.

We begin with roots. Feed the spirits with leaf litter, for this rebuilds soil. Too often people want to blow it into bags and be done, so build yourself a mould-heap altar instead. And if you see a neigh-

bour revving the leaf blower, intervene; perhaps ask them ahead of schedule.



Offer to bag the leaves and carry them somewhere that needs them, a tired verge, a hungry bed. You are not scolding anyone. You are diverting the dead from the bin-lorry, which leads nowhere, back to the ground, which leads to everything.

A leaf saved from landfill is a broken cycle on the mend.

The trunk: forage the hedgerow to defect from the System, but do so sensibly, for the birds and beasts need their share too. Fruits for eating and preserves, fungi if you truly know what you're doing.

Carry two bags as you go, one for your haul and one for what shouldn't be there. A summer of activity leaves the woods full of human litter, the cans and the dog-bags and the spent disposable barbecue, so let us do the honest thing as we move through the trees and carry out what harms the place, out of respect for the woodland spirit.

Samhuinn is the final season of the larder, and every wild thing gathered is a small secession from a machine that ships your breakfast spread half around the world.

It is physic as well as food. The medicine now lives in the fruit and the root, never the leaf, the strength drawn down for winter. Haw, the fruit of the hawthorn, tinctured for the heart. Elderberry, readied against the flu – and easy to make a kitchen look like a crime scene. To doctor yourself off-grid is the deeper defecation.

Branches: plant them, stick them in the ground, guerrilla style. Yes, guerrilla tree planting. Not all of us have large gardens, so use public, communal land. This wants a canny, subversive approach (search the Phantom Planter online for inspiration), but there are vast tracts of bare public ground going begging.

Slip in a tree or two with a stake and an official-looking tag and no one will be any the wiser. It is the perfect moment for planting, for the sapling roots all through the dark while it sleeps, and wakes in spring already anchored.

Root, trunk, branch. This is where the Radical Wheel begins, one leaf, one berry, one buried tree at a time



Bardic Tales

Love Letter to the Jay by Karen Allen

Garra-ulus gland-arius, eco-engineer, woodland sentinel, aerial predator early warning mimic, precious, pretty plumed jay - Rest your truth-telling and gossip a-while; diligently duty-bound to gather the royal jewels that lie forlorn at the feet of the mighty King.

The cache of five little parcels of potential in your throat. The sixth, the fattest of them all, in your beak. Fly away and carry your precious cargo far across the striped fallow fields to wild hedgerow and scrubland, hungrily carved out by boar, deer, horse and ox in their quest for their own nourishing treasures; overseen and protected by the unseen shape-shifting hare.

Hide your hoard for safekeeping within the softly fertile dark womb of The Mother, each one placed perfectly, precisely, deliberately drawing sacred geometry of ever ending and rebirthing beneath the surface - Circle of creation, cosmic seed grove gift to Gaia.

Tucked in cosy by the light golden blanket softly laid down by His Majesty, as his kingdom turns inward to contemplate, reflect and rest, as the equinox tips into the long sleep.

Remember, beautiful brazen bird, where you buried your secret: mind-map the spot! For, only these will you find again when the Beltane bells herald the dawning, when the little princes rise and unfurl and breathe, awaiting your return.

For you to come from afar and find them and skillfully and swiftly unearth their unseen tendrils, to clean them and nurture them and savour the long-awaited delicacy of the succulent sustaining germ that sacredly decayed away in the dark days, a springboard for green life a-new.

And, just as deftly, you kiss the fragile anchors as you lay them lovingly back into Mother's belly to grow and become.

To become deep rooted princes of their landscape to rule as kings in the new dominion for the next thousand years.

Garra ulus grand arius, great chattering acorn gatherer, hear my words of gratitude for your service and your legacy and the interconnectedness with The Great Mother, Father Sun, and the life-blood Holy Waters in the birthing of new kingdoms as The Great Wheel turns.



Murder, She Fed: Befriending the Local Corvids by Morgan Hollett

This article is sponsored by 'The Murder Outside My Window' and 'The Murder Behind the Fire Engines'. Author has received one very good twig and a chunk of week-old mystery meat as caw-mpensation. Opinions are the author's own; bad ones may nonetheless be grounds for swooping.

"I'm gonna have to start calling you The Morrigan," my friend and fellow OBODie Matthew joked a few weeks ago. We'd just stepped foot into the street where I live when my other friend, Crowmeo, landed in the tree beside us and let out a soft caw, patiently awaiting his afternoon snack.

As you might be able to guess from his punny name, his preference for trees and the headline of this article, Crowmeo is one of the local corvids. Specifically, he's a hooded crow. He lives very close to my apartment block and is forever scrapping with Crowbert and Crownelia, who moved onto the estate first and are your peak 'Neighbourhood Watch' neighbours. These three — and the occasional plus-one invited by Crowmeo (I'm yet to determine if it's the same on-again-off-again partner or a new boo each time) — make up 'The Murder Outside My Window'. There's also 'The Murder Behind the Fire Engines': Crowland, Crowsmary, Crowmain and Crowsalie.

But wait: how did we get here? Why am I being stalked by crows? Why do they all have ridiculous

names? And what on earth does this have to do with my druidic practice?

Let me explain (except the ridiculous names, because they're obviously all fantastic

and that was a trick question). I've always loved a dark, gloomy and misunderstood character, and this seems to have spilled over into the animal world. On the land, foxes and raccoons rank high on my list of favourite animals. When it comes to

the sky, that honour goes straight to the crows.

Things I love about crows include:

- how ominous their caws sound in comparison to the delightful twittering of other birds,
- their beady black eyes that always seem to follow you,
- their feisty punk-like attitude,
- their slightly dishevelled appearance (hooded crows

don't have the smooth, glossy black feathers of their UK counterpart, the carrion crow, and are forever looking somewhat scruffy),

- and, of course, their wonderfully intelligent minds.

Last summer, whenever I walked a certain route with my small black-and-white dog, I noticed I was being followed. There'd be a quiet whooshing of feathers, followed by the quiet 'thunk' of a crow landing on the nearest perch. At first, I just thought "that's cool!" and kept walking. Then, I began to greet them with a gentle "hello friend!". Whenever I'd speak to them, they'd gently tilt their heads to one side, as if in acknowledgement. I later learned that there was a woman in my area who'd feed them while out and about with her small black dog, and that the crows were coming to check which of us they'd spotted. This was one of my first real-life encounters with the intelligence of these creatures and it inspired me to pay more attention to them.

As time went on, I noticed how the crows would drop hard-shelled nuts into the road, attempting to break them through the force of the fall in the first instance, or using the occasional passing car as an improvised nutcracker when that failed. I saw how excited they'd get when the neighbour with the tasty dog treats and a *sharing-is-caring* mentality walked by. And one day, earlier this



year, an avid birdwatching couple in my social circle explained that they make interactive puzzles for their crows: they began feeding them peanuts in the shell, as crows love a good brain teaser as much as the food itself, and moved on to half-burying them or wrapping them in layers of biodegradable material to scale up the challenge-factor.

It wasn't long (two seconds after hearing this information, to be precise) before unshelled peanuts went on the shopping list and I'd been officially recruited to the position of *'Feeder of the Omen Bringers'* without knowing it.

My first time feeding the crows was delightfully magical. Although they initially kept their distance, I still delighted in chucking a peanut over my shoulder and hearing the whoosh of feathers and the crunch of beak against shell when they thought I wasn't looking (I was definitely peeking over my shoulder). Over time, they've become increasingly brave. Nowadays, they'll land right next to my dog without a second thought and aren't hesitant to ask for seconds, thirds, fourths and fifths. No matter how many peanuts I pack, I always seem to return home empty-pocketed.

Through this daily routine of greeting and feeding my local murders, I've learned so much about this wonderful species. Some of it comes through observation, some through further reading. I've learned that Crowmeo is the cheekiest of the bunch. He's the first to greet us in the morning and is always excited for his snack. He'll often squirrel the first two servings away for later, pretend he's already finished them and come back for yet another serving within two minutes of us being outside. Crowbert and Crownelia, meanwhile, will either tuck in straight away or take their snack to their favourite tree.

As for *'The Murder Behind the Fire Engines'*: my walking route in this area begins with a tree-lined path, comes out at a short riverside walk behind an office building, then loops back into a second tree-lined path and ends at the street. Crowland, Crowsmary, Crowmain and Crowsalie know how to use this terrain to their advantage. On the tree-lined parts of the route, they'll flit from tree to tree, rustling the branches to announce their presence and swooping down as soon as the peanuts hit the ground. Along the riverside, they'll take shifts. Two will hop along behind me

at ground level, making sure I don't get too far ahead, while two monitor from the rooftop of the office. Back at the street, they'll jump from car to car with loud metallic skittering sounds just to make sure I know they're still there. One time, they even set up an ambush! I willingly walked into it, of course. What clever little creatures they are.

This daily routine has become one of my most consistent druidic practices. As much as I'd love to be that person who meditates every day, it's often one of the first practices that falls by the wayside during a chaotic week, even if doing it would help navigate said chaos. The crows, however, are a little harder to forget. If you do, they'll certainly let you know about it. These few minutes every morning and lunchtime are an invitation to slow down and really see the world around me. They're an opportunity to connect to the landscape and the creatures that call it home. And, perhaps most importantly, they relight that feeling of childlike wonder in my heart and encourage me to add that little bit of much-needed whimsy to my day.

After all, there's nothing quite like watching a pint-sized Lord of Darkness fluff up their feathers, greet you with a little clickity-clack, and trot down the street beside you with a spring in their step.

Sometimes a Crow by Linda Davis

Sometimes a Crow will speak
Fly past the window and call a greeting
Or comment on the weather.
Sometimes a crow will stalk
Come right up and talk
Pass an opinion or a bit of gossip
Juicy as a worm.
Conversation with a crow
Is usually quite commonplace
It doesn't always have to be about omens!



Beyond the Mists of Exile to Reunite with the Whole

by Dr Alberto Fragasso

"In ancient times we surrendered ourselves to mythology, and we saw the Gods everywhere. We spoke with them face to face... Even today our country people speak with the dead and with some who perhaps have never died as we understand death; and even our educated people pass, not without great difficulty, into that state of stillness which is the condition of vision."

William Butler Yeats

In ancient times, within the Celtic mythopoetic landscape, the mist was considered sacred. Folklore speaks often of passages through the mists, of portals opening and pathways leading beyond them, as Marion Zimmer Bradley recounts in romantic tones in *The Mists of Avalon*.

At times, the mist may draw us toward it with its mystical charm, inviting us to reach it, to contemplate it and walk through it, to dream within its embrace. The Cymry, the Celts of Wales, would say that we may have been seized by the spirit of hiraeth—a longing for something our soul once knew, long ago.

In his book *The Mist-Filled Path*, Frank MacEowen invites us to consider that crossing the threshold of the mists means learning to dance with the trickster side of existence, which at times conspires through spirits, at other times through the forces of nature, dreams, and synchronicities. It means moving toward the unknown, beyond our comfort zones, and coming into contact with our deepest wounds.

An old therapeutic axiom of Gestalt psychology—also found at the heart of shamanism and contemplative mysticism throughout the world—suggests that the healing of a wound must come from the blood of the wound itself. In other words, the healing of an emotional or psycho-spiritual wound occurs precisely by entering its terrain, not by avoiding it. In this way, healing our exile from the inner world happens by entering that world in search of the vital healing force we need.

The mist can indeed be a portal—but what lies beyond? It is the thin veil that separates us from the Otherworld, the possibility of encountering new realms. What lies beyond? If we believe that something divides us from a "beyond," it is because,

fundamentally, we feel exiled—and exile is the state of consciousness in which Western humanity constantly lives.

The sense of separation from the Whole is foundational to Western thought: everything is encapsulated and boxed in—within a cell, a system, a concept, a thought; everything is organized and follows a specific, determined structure that

can be empirically measured, evaluated, standardized, so that it may be reproduced according to mechanical constancy.

This concept, this worldview, can over time atrophy our gaze, identifying us strongly with a cognitive empiricism in which we risk exiling ourselves from the great Whole—as it is called in the great Buddhist schools—from the cosmic and oceanic consciousness of which we are a part.

To immerse oneself in cosmic consciousness means surrendering to the seas of love. We may imagine entering gently without restraint, or diving headlong into its waters. It is an ancient memory we have all experienced, akin to the perception of having once been a fetus safely gestating in the mother's womb, in the eternal matrix of becoming.

When we immerse ourselves in cosmic consciousness, we realize that we are part of a Whole—but to do so we must dissolve the egoic mind. Just as the stream flows into the ocean and returns home. As the river and its tributaries empty through an estuary into the sea, so too shall we, sooner or later, pour into the seas of existence, into the great all-encompassing ocean.

All this unfolds within the depth of a conscious breath. Otherwise, parts of us may feel exiled from the Whole; what matters instead is to move in the direction of a sense of belonging—to Nature, to the Cosmos, to the Earth and all its forms of life.



To move consciously from a state of separation to one of union.

To do this, we must learn to go beyond the mists, to cross the Threshold and come to know, to experience the other worlds; for it is only from the time of the dream—the Dreamtime, as Australian Aboriginal peoples call it—from which we have separated ourselves, that we may draw upon the knowledge of the great Whole, the vast cosmic record that preserve the memory of existence and of our ancestors.

In that passage through the mists, we may access an infinity of possible programs of knowledge that no course and no measuring instrument can equal. It is possible that the ancient Druids and Celtic seers learned to see beyond the mists in order to access a knowledge invisible to most—a divinatory gaze concerning the capacity to know with a capital “K”; a knowledge that endures and, when refined, becomes wisdom. A knowledge that reaches the heart of things in order to lead us to the very center of the heart itself, where we are all headed.

The myths that speak of realms beyond the mists tell of Avalon and King Arthur, described by Tom Cowan in *Fire in the Head* as a shamanic king or magician, capable of crossing the thresholds of other worlds and returning to the great Summerland in the Avalonian realm.

What separates us from these lands? Perhaps only a breath of wind? The act of listening to the rustle of leaves, of taking by the hand someone dear, someone we love? Listening to the voice of the ancestors, of the gods?

What truly separates us from the great Whole? Handsome Lake, a Seneca religious leader of the Iroquois people, said that the dimension separating the living from the dead is exactly as wide as “the thread of a maple leaf”; the veils are thin—it is up to us to cross them consciously, and the mystical practices of dreamers may lead us along these paths.

And so we set out once more...
until the next journey...



Beyond the Veil of Annwn by Valeria Iannini

I glimpse beauty, beyond the veil:
the light weight of your head upon my lap,
a shore of earth
within the sea of mist,
the silent knowledge
of being in love,
as loved as I am loving.

But it is a glimmer that trembles,
a reflection on the water
already lost to the Otherworld.

You do not see it.
You do not feel it.
You do not perceive the peace that waits beyond
the clamour of the living.

At times I lean out,
beyond the veil,
and breathe: love bears the scent of sacred
things
when no one names them.

Why do dreams have such deep roots in the
invisible world?
Why do they know how to be truer than the
light of day?
And why do you not cross
the borders that inhabit me,
to seek the very same land?



Crow Spirals by Cathy Johnson

The Alchemy of Shadow by Dasyre Sires

As the veil of Samhain settles over the land, the Cailleach, the ancient hag of winter in Celtic lore, stirs her great cauldron at the edge of the world. She is the keeper of endings and the weaver of beginnings, the one who breathes frost into the hills so that life may rest and renew.

She turns her heavy spoon through the substance of the universe, patient as stone. She waits, looming beyond the veil, her gaze both stern and kind, knowing every sorrow the living carry. Within me, I feel the black, viscous bile of shame, guilt, regret, and pain pulsing thickly through my veins.

As the veil thins on the final harvest, my hands tremble, cupped before me. My soul vibrates with the turning season, and my palms fill with the tar-like substance my spirit secretes—thick and unwilling.

Yet as I sit exposed, holding my sorrow, shame, and despair, the Cailleach simply offers a bowl. Her face softens with a faint, knowing smile; the kind an elder gives when she sees that growth and grief are the same thing seen from different sides.

I watch as she pours my darkness into her cauldron and begins to stir again. Mesmerized by the swirling blackness, I begin to see the truth: the darkness before me is not bile, but the oil of existence itself.

We praise the brilliance of flame, the awe of performance, and the power of creation, yet all depend on something unseen and unlovely. Oil is never admired, but without it the gears grind, the fire dies, and motion stops. So too with the soul of the world. Our grief, our regret, our shame are the dark lubricants of spirit; the uncelebrated matter that keeps consciousness turning.

The Cailleach, the alchemist of shadows, reminds us that darkness is not the absence of divinity but its rawest form. In Hermetic thought, creation begins with “nigredo”: the black phase of alchemy where all that was must first decay. From that dissolution comes the ‘prima materia’, the substance of new life. She takes our psychic residue, our spent emotions, and refines them until they become the very material of awakening.



Pain is the crude oil of the soul. Through reflection, surrender, and time, it distills into wisdom. No flower blooms without rot; no gold gleams without fire.

The natural world whispers this endlessly: the fallen leaf feeds the root, the corpse feeds the crow, the decay of one season births the next. Even the oil beneath our feet was once forest and sunlight, pressed and darkened until it became the energy that drives us forward. Our emotions obey the same law. The

guilt we carry and the regrets we bury are the compressed fossils of our becoming.

In this light, the universe appears as a vast, divine mechanism, its gears turning on the sacred oil of experience. Energy—the spark of the divine that moves through all things—cannot be created or destroyed, only transformed. The Cailleach’s cauldron is that transformation made visible. Every tear shed and sorrow faced becomes part of the great lubrication of existence. The cosmos runs as much on heartbreak as on joy.

To deny our pain is to let the engine seize. To honor it is to pour it into her waiting vessel and help keep life’s motion alive. What we call darkness is not the opposite of light but its medium; the space where the fire takes shape and meaning begins.

Now I understand her smile. She looks upon my shame not as a flaw, but as proof of participation in the great work, the “opus magnum”, of being human. What I saw as poison, she knew as potential. What I feared as failure, she saw as fuel.

Perhaps this is her wisdom: that our brokenness is not to be discarded but offered. Even the blackest waters of the soul are sacred when returned to the cauldron. Every sorrow is a drop of oil keeping the world’s great wheel in motion.

And so, when the wind stills and the cold deepens, I will remember—the engine of existence hums because of its darkness. The oil runs black, and that is holy.

Raven Spirit by Jo-animist

Raven spirit you spoke to me
A soar encapsulated from the east
Vantage, vanish to western peace
Ever creating magic, release
Never rest until, restored lease



Image by Jennifer Murphy

Reviews

The Hereafter by Luke Eastwood



The Hereafter is Eastwood's first non-fiction novel, set in the dystopian future of 2045. A terrorist organisation called The Religious Rights Militia threatens society, or so The Ministry would have you believe. Atheism is the way and the government will stop at nothing for it to remain this

way. 1984 meets *Total Recall* in this sci-fi cat and mouse thriller.

The story follows Daniel McBride, an Irish writer from Donegal, who is often nostalgic about his homeland and how starkly different it is to the concrete and impersonal London in which he now resides. Daniel is being sponsored by The Ministry to do a book tour of his new book *God, and Other Fairy Tales*. His publisher hails it "atheism for the masses."

Daniel is attacked at his first book signing and suffers a fatal accident en-route to the hospital. He is declared brain dead and his life support is set to be turned off. Meanwhile, Daniel awakens in a dream-like state to his dead sister welcoming him to the afterlife. After time in heaven and deep spiritual experiences, he has the chance to go back, to tell the world what he knows, and undo everything he has written so far. He keeps his recovery a secret as he plans to release an incendiary book that sets him on a dangerous manhunt where even those close to him will face the consequences.

The book was a slow burn at first. Eastwood is very descriptive of the world he has created but when the story gets going there is a thrilling sense of fear and urgency. I would have liked some of the subjects brought up to be explored further, but I became invested in the story as the book went on and was left wondering about the aftermath of McBride's book. The novel does contain some offensive language and touches on potentially sensitive content.

by Rae O'Reilly

Ghosts of the Medicine Show

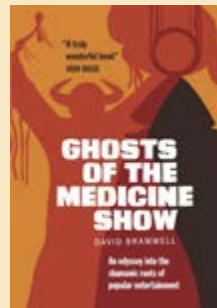
by David Bramwell

The book of the talk given by David Bramwell at the Summer Gathering relates a personal journey, a reflective odyssey of loss, of absence. From the death of his parents and the grief that forced him to reflect on his own past, Bramwell investigates how we collectively deal with larger losses inflicted upon us by modernity which he describes as 'soul-loss'. A discovery – the book *The Death and Resurrection Show* by Rogan Taylor – led Bramwell to explore other losses. Using authors such as Taylor and Bruce Chatwin, Bramwell shows how their extensive travels led them to Shamanism, the form of religious experience practiced by nomadic peoples which became their means by which suffering was alleviated, a purging of the sickness within those societies that emerged into healing. He raises the question posed by Chatwin on his travels: 'What lost wisdom lies in the itinerant life?'

Bramwell answers this question via a discussion of forms of entertainment that preserve, as he describes 'the living knowledge of [these] age-old shamanic skills and traditions.' He discusses many forms of cultural production, including pantomime, circuses, chart music, *Doctor Who* and the reinvented Sherlock Holmes, the *X-Factor*, the traditions of Christmas, all of which he considers as evidence that the shaman and his rituals still exist, preserved in these new entertainments. Bramwell is particularly insightful on the matter that 'live entertainment may be a form of healing in an age of soul-loss.' Using contemporary artists, Bramwell argues that this is how we now heal from our own societal malaise - through the productions of artists like David Bowie and Adam Ant. The adoption of a persona and their music allowed them and other artists like Nick Cave, David Byrne, Yoko Ono, Tom Waits and David Hoyle, like the shamans of the past, to address suffering through the shamanic rituals of costume and repeated mantras and rhythms that transported them to the underworld – their own personal hell – and from which they – and their audiences - re-emerged as healed.

by Rebekah Owens

Ghosts of the Medicine Show is now available on the OBOD store >



Andrew's Bit At The Back

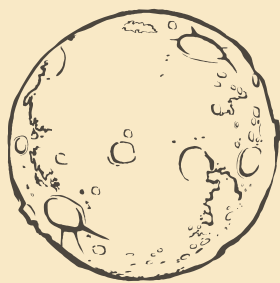
I don't know about the rest of you, but I'm finding the world difficult to deal with at the moment. It's hanging really heavily on me. The news just seems to be one terrifying thing after another – the hottest summer on record, wild fires, a super El Niño ... and that's just the climate! Then there are the various wars raging around the world, the unpredictability of certain world leaders and the belligerent, threatening language which seems to have overtaken international diplomacy. Add on the cost-of-living crisis and the threats from AI (both at the macro level and its impact on our workplaces) and it feels like a perfect storm is forming around us.

In such turbulent times, issues in our personal lives, which would have been difficult to deal with at the best of times, become simply overwhelming.

A month ago, I was due to go for a weekend at a retreat centre with some friends. The prospect of an escape to the countryside, which should have been a welcome relief, became, in itself, a source of significant stress. Would the weather be too hot or too wet for me to go? Would the roads be too busy or jammed up with road works? Would I have time to do the preparatory work I needed to do before I set off? Rather than being able to enjoy the build up, I became bogged down in issues at work and home which almost derailed the whole thing. I arrived at the venue buzzing with nervous energy from the world outside and I couldn't easily let go of it. Every request made of me became another piece of kindling on my bonfire of tension.

And then we went for a walk in the forest, in the darkness, to go and perform a full moon ritual. In the deepness of the night, under the protection of some mighty oaks, something changed. It was as if an enormous weight was lifted from me. The concerns of the world simply melted away in the moonlight.

As I'm sure I've mentioned before, I am a diary keeper and have been since 1985. My way of processing the day is to write it down so, once we got back from the woods, I went to my room and wrote out how I felt: "Enchantment is a state of mind, a conscious act" I reflected. The things that were weighing me down were still there – the world was still in chaos, as was the M5, which I had to navigate again in just a few days – but I put it to one side because I had found enchantment in the beauty of the moonlit woods instead.



Bathing in the moonlight through the open window of my bedroom, I had a vision of the moon which I wanted to paint. I felt all fired up, wanting to grab a set of brushes and some poster paint and begin creating immediately. The next day we had the opportunity to do just that, so I realised the very picture I'd had in my mind's eye

the night before. It felt like therapy. The moon, which had lifted that weight from me, which I'd seen so clearly in my mind was now on a piece of card in front of me. It has become a sigil of that evening and how I managed to consciously step into the enchantment of our world.

When the mundane world gets too much, we can step outside of it, maybe just for a short time, to feel a sense of enchantment again. It's not always an easy thing to do but if we just stop, take a breath and seek a gateway to step through, we can get there. On that evening, it was the moon which was the portal for me, but it could so easily have been the softness of a raven's feather, the sound of rain falling onto leaves or even a single point of starlight in an otherwise dark sky. Enchantment is everywhere, but the mundane world often makes us believe it is difficult to find when, in reality, it is just a slow breath away.

*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



Facebook:

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



TikTok:

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



Instagram:

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



Threads:

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

*A peaceful moment with ponies
Beloved friend, remembered,
honoured, loved and seen.
Her joyful spirit infusing
the hare's curiosity at sunrise,
and the fawn, free in the forest,
amongst beech-tree birdsong
and clouds that smile.*

*In the land of Avalon,
where ancient yew trees
embrace grief with grace
and wrap their arms in splendour.
Owl-faced oak trees observe
with wonder and wildness.
Facing west, the place of rest,
the place of home.*



*Poem and photo by
Charlie Bigwood*