

SerpentStar

Newsletter for the Australian and New Zealand members of OBOD

Alban Arthan, June 2005

From the chapter 'Winter'

Hidden inside either pocket,
like young within their nest,
the hands evade the chilling
wind.

The head keeps beneath the cap
like a turtle from the rain.
But the heart soars above the
storm,
exposed to the splendour of the
season.

'Songs of the Seasons – A Collection
of Zen Poetry and Paintings' –
Stephen Cassettari

The Ascension of Time

On the oceans of life
To traverse the wind
A speck of life
Leaves a mark on time
Stars blaze and shine
In the galaxies entwined
And the mystery unwinds
To the ascension of time

Midnight starlight
Swaying in the wind
On the world of mankind
To the journey in time
Unravel the twine
Is the universe thine
Acknowledge mankind
The ascension of time

Mandaagora

Bright Eyes

Your eyes are glazed ,
But in some memory deep within your soul ,
Do you still smell sweet perfumes on the wind ?
Fresh scent of grass new bruised beneath your feet ,
And rich dark mouldering leaves heaped on the ground,
And in some corner of your drifting mind,
Are you still sensing beauty in the night ?
Returning to familiar fragrant paths,
Where lie the safe warm depths you once called home.

Cherry '05





STORM WOLF'S RAMBLINGS



Hello, and welcome to another issue of SerpentStar. I hope it finds you all well, and enjoying the colder weather!

The winter has been quite mild here in northern NSW so far, the days still reaching into the low twenties most days, but the nights are getting cold, down to -1 last week!

I have settled well into my new home (please note the new editorial address), and mostly finished unpacking, though I have run out of bookshelf space! Ah, if only I had the time to sit and read all of those books... one day!!

Inside this issue you will find poetry, a close encounter with a bird, and details of this years Assembly! It is to be held south of Nowra at Currajong, a beautiful area I had the pleasure to visit early last year!

Being a pagan/Druid, I understand that life works in cycles. In the death of one cycle is the birth of another. I know this, but yet it still surprises me sometimes! Remember the old saying, there are no ends, only new beginnings!

Take care,

Storm Wolf

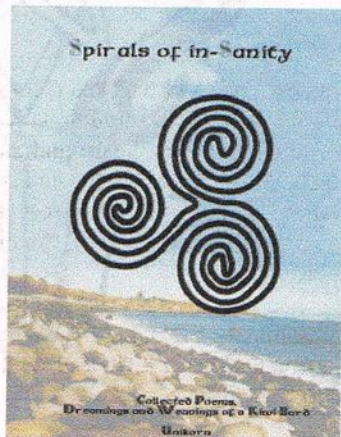
Bright greetings my friends and family

I know that some of you have expressed an interest in my poetry, and I wanted to let you all know that I finally have had printed a book of my poetry. Some of you will have seen the first run I did, back in 2003.

Its available on my website

<http://pagangrove.net/poetrybook.htm> if any of you are still interested just drop me an email

Love and light
Kirsti (Unikorn)



Dreaming.

Dreaming dreaming ~

To sit and dream;

Alope on a beach;

On the top of a hill;

Or maybe just on a window sill.

Dreaming dreaming ~

To walk and dream;

Through a pretty garden fair;

Down by a cool meandering stream;

Or maybe a walk in the rain somewhere.

Dreaming dreaming ~

To run and dream;

With the wind in your hair;

Through the cold night air;

Or maybe run down a hill somewhere.

Dreaming dreaming ~

To dream in the dark;

Tucked safe in bed about midnight;

or just look up at the star lit sky;

Just dreaming as the world rushes by.

- raelene taylor 1998

Disclaimer

Opinions published in this newsletter are not necessarily the opinions of the editor or the Order.

Submission/Subscription Details

Subscription is \$10 per year for four issues, or free via email. Email format is Adobe Acrobat (.pdf). Please let me know if you require a different format.

Submissions can be sent via email:

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The Five Ages of Mankind

On this great path we call Life, there are many lessons for the learning, many transitions to undergo, many doorways to open and explore beyond. While each life we have is a tiny but unique expression of the life pulse of the creative Universe, even so we can discern a common pattern of learning and development that was recognised by our ancestors. This pattern is known as the Five Ages of Man - Birth, Tutelage, Love, Repose and Death. Five is an intriguing number; it is the number of the senses through which we perceive the Infinite; there are five fingers on the hand; the Celtic Ogham alphabet is grouped in sets of five trees; Ireland was divided into five provinces and the faces of the Goddess are said to be five in number.

Clearly then, in the Celtic tradition the number five has a great deal of importance. It is the number representative of Humanity; through the five ages of each earthly life the end in Death meets the beginning in a new birth, through one turn of the Wheel as the endless knot unwinds. Five is also the number that represents the Ordered Universe. This order is essential for the continuity of life. Beyond the boundaries of order lies a vast unknowable wasteland of Chaos, hostile (yes, hostile!) to life, yet a part of this Chaos is always present, just around the corner, ready to wreak its havoc upon us. So finely balanced is the world of order that it is fraught with danger, as the world of Chaos seeks relentlessly to topple down our nice safe havens.

There would seem to be a universal belief throughout native religions that at certain times of life people are not completely 'of this world', and the consequent dangers to them are very great indeed unless properly controlled by ritual. These have come to be known as 'rites of passage' and their purpose is to bring such vulnerable states as puberty, menstruation and childbirth into the social order of the human world, thus preventing a lapse into Chaos. It is usual in such cases for strict taboos to be placed on the affected person with regard to their eating habits, movement, dress and so on. (Many examples of such taboos world-wide can be found in Frazer's well known book 'The Golden Bough').

Transitions from one state to another have always been viewed as sacred and magical. We can find many detailed references to life transitions in our legends, with tales of miraculous births, wild adventures of youth, and strange, fateful deaths. Let us consider, then, the Five Ages of Man and some of their associated rites of passage within the Celtic tradition.

BIRTH

On this our earthly journey, we begin with our birth, the entrance through the womb of the Great Mother. Birth is one of the greatest Mysteries of Life. In the old Irish legends of 'coimperta' we find illustrations of the wonder births of Gods, kings and heroes that have usually been foretold long before. There is always a destined time or place for the birth to happen, for which signs and omens are given. Strange, out of the ordinary events suddenly come to the fore, emphasising the nature of childbirth as being not quite of this earthly world. For this reason pregnant women were required to

during labour. The conception is often attributed to the swallowing of a worm in the mother's drinking cup, as in the case of the conception of Etain.

The father of the bairn is often revealed as an Otherworldly being who visits the woman at a strange hour. Mongan's father was said to be Manannan. He appeared to Fiachna Finn, a king of Ulster, during a battle and offered him victory if the king let him sleep with his wife. When a son was born to the queen, Manannan took the boy Mongan away to his Land of Promise, where he reared him until he was twelve years old.

Sometimes the maiden is kept prisoner by her father, as was Balor's daughter Ethlinn. Despite this isolation, events took their destined course. With the help of the Druidess Birog, Cian gained access to the tower and the birth of Lugh followed.

One of the most interesting of the 'coimperta' concerns that of the birth of Angus the Ever Young, son of the union between Boann and the Dagda. Boann sent her husband Elcmar on a long errand in order to conceal the union from him. The Dagda, meanwhile, caused the sun and moon to stand still for nine months, so that Angus Og was conceived and born all on the same day.

The events surrounding such 'wonder births' as these serve to emphasise the sacredness, the mystery and hence the vulnerability of this state of being. The influence of the Otherworld is strong and can override such human factors as barrenness and enforced seclusion. Often there is a prophecy concerning the birth of a Great One who will cause the downfall of another, as in the case of Balor, who it was said would be slain by his own grandson (Lugh). Even when steps are taken to try and prevent this, it is always to no avail.

The Otherworldly 'fathers' are often kings or princes in their own lands, and are described as being of noble stature, which points to the belief in the essential divinity of kings and great heroes. It also shows the presence of an immortal Spirit, the divine spark, that part of us which has its full expression in the realms beyond the Wheel of our earthly life.

The vulnerability of the newborn infant was uppermost in the minds of our ancestors, compounded no doubt by the high rate of infant mortality. One of the greatest dangers that faces the young child is that of being abducted by the faery people and taken away to their hidden realms. In such cases a 'faery changeling' is left in the place of the child - a weak, sickly wretch of a thing that soon withers and dies. Protective measures have to be taken, most notably the making of rowan crosses tied with red thread which are hung over cradles. The child will also receive its 'footing' as soon as possible after birth - traditionally the child's feet are not permitted to touch the ground until this ceremony takes place! At this occasion the link is forged between the child and the land of its clan and forefathers. Through this sacred ritual, which the Old Ones, the First Parents and the ancestors are called to witness, the child is well and truly 'earthed' to the soil of this physical plane. It is customary for the clan elders to come forward in turn to give a blessing to

practise for one of the child's guardians ('godparents') to be a clan elder, who would pledge to safeguard the child in the event of the death of its natural parents.

TUTELAGE

The Age of Tutelage comes upon the young boy or girl as soon as he or she takes the first tentative steps towards learning about the world. Much of this learning process can be a painful experience, for example the way most children learn that fire can burn them is by putting their hands too close to the flames. In Celtic times all forms of learning and education were encouraged, praised and respected. The type of education the child received was primarily dependent upon the family's status or caste. The children of landmen would be taught how to herd, milk, prepare malt, grind corn in the quern, and so on. The children of the nobility would be taught archery, horsemanship, weaponry skills and board games.

The custom of fosterage was practised mainly by the higher ranks of society. Foster children would often receive their craft apprenticeship in their foster home, and were treated in every way in the same manner as the children of that household. The ties between the foster parents and the child were by far stronger than those of blood relations, for it was seen as a sacred bonding. The foster parents would undertake to defend and protect the child and if any harm came to the child while under their care it was seen as a very serious failing of their sacred duty.

Nevertheless, children in Celtic society were given free rein, with little restriction being imposed on their activity. This freedom was, however, dramatically curtailed with the onset of puberty. With the outward, physical signs of adulthood developing, the young person was no longer merely a child, but moving towards their destiny in adult life. It was of the utmost importance that during this transitional phase the young person was given a proper direction and some form of responsibility to their clan. Girls had to begin the spinning of their quota of wool in preparation for future marriage. Boys would be sent out to guard the herds and ensure that none strayed. In other words, the transition had to be quickly overcome, through various means, in order to bring the youth fully into the social order of the clan.

For girls, puberty was considered a potentially dangerous time, due to the power that the first menstrual blood was believed to be imbued with. Therefore the young girl had to be taken to a place of seclusion, away from her family, where she would be initiated into the ways of womanhood. No male must even lay eyes on her during this critical time, for it was believed his death would follow. In her excellent book 'The Wise Wound' Penelope Shuttle points out that this seclusion is in no way to be seen as a 'punishment', nor is it a bad thing for women. This period of seclusion, which was undertaken by all women at their menstruation, was a time for women to explore the inner Mysteries of womanhood within the realms of the Red Goddess. It was a time for the gaining of wisdom and the realisation of potential.

The adolescent boy is also led to the gateway of initiation. A series of events in his life will ensure that he is ready to face the challenge that awaits him. These include separation from

his family and his natural mother, and the demonstration of feats of strength, courage and endurance. The initiation tests for both boys and girls involve humiliation but also elevation and a sense of triumph. They must undergo the symbolic death of their childhood, to allow a rebirth into Manhood and Womanhood. After the ceremony the initiate is given a new name which he or she will be known by for the rest of their life, thus breaking forever the ties with childhood. In the case of young male warriors, they will begin their training in arms from then on, often from female warriors. When the training was completed, the male warriors were given their gessa by a priestess of the clan - prohibitions that they must always observe.

Two outstanding illustrations of the rebirth into adulthood can be drawn from the legends of Fionn MacCumhal and Cuchulain. Despite the huge difference in the time periods of both sagas (the Fenian tales are now recognised to be a very ancient legendary cycle, whereas the Cuchulain saga brings us into the period of recorded history) we can see a similar theme of the trials and tests leading to Manhood.

In the case of Fionn, he is separated from his mother and family by force of circumstance from a very early age. After his warrior training he regains the magical craneskin bag, the sacred treasure of the Clan Baiscne. He then undergoes his Bardic training and receives the wisdom of Fintan, the great Salmon of Knowledge, at which time he also receives his second naming. The third remarkable event that finally marks out his destiny as leader of the Fianna is his defeat of Aillen, the Otherworld demon of Tara.

In the case of Cuchulain, he fights with and overcomes a hound of the sidhe, and then takes the place of the hound as guardian of the house of Culain. Through this he gains his new name, the Hound of Culain. He also takes up arms at the age of seven, on the day that the druid Cathbad foretold that one who takes up arms at that time will be a great name in Ireland.

And so the young boy emerges as a fully fledged man of his clan, proud of who he is and what he has achieved, proud to be a defender of his clan and upholder of his heritage. And the young maiden emerges forth from her seclusion as a woman of her clan, proud of her worth, proud to feel the life pulse of her mother, and her mother's mother, and the Great Mother of All, in her veins, and carrying the flame in the heart of all women within.

LOVE

We enter the Love phase in the summer of our lives; in the Great Wheel this begins at Beltaine, when the Willow Goddess takes the Green Man as her lover. This is the stage when adulthood is reached, together with all its responsibilities. This stage is concerned with the achievement of your potential, however you choose to do so. In Bronze Age Celtic society, by this time you would be expected to have laid down your foundations within the tribe and settled on your chosen craft, giving you your life direction. This phase seems to begin around the age of twenty eight years, an age of great significance in the Celtic tradition, when we complete our journey around the first spiral of our being, our outward life journey, and move towards the next, the inner spiral of being.

branches were used to cover the body when being carried on the bier to the grave. Tall pillar stones with Ogham inscriptions would be erected above the graves of notable people such as kings. It was also common to build cairns over graves.

In Celtic folklore the burial mounds of the Dead are synonymous with the dwelling places of the 'Good People', the Sidhe. They are also entrances to the Otherworld, the lands of Faerie. There is a close relationship in Celtic religious belief between ancestor worship and deity worship. Many of the ancient Celtic clans claim descent from a particular deity, their common ancestor. Does it really matter whether there ever really existed a Smith named Gobhniu? To argue over whether this is 'true' or 'false' is to miss the point entirely.

Just as the birth and destiny of kings and heroes is foretold by Druids in the legends, so too are their deaths, recounted in the "oite", the tales of tragic deaths. Often the individual knows all through their life what their fate will be. In Celtic mythology no death is an 'accident' or premature; it is pre-ordained and there will always be omens. In the case of the Ulster hero Cuchulain, a number of omens forewarn him on the day of his death. Weapons tumble down, the Morrigan breaks his chariot in an attempt to delay him, three times fifty queens wail and cry at his departure for they know his fate. He passes two women washing a bloody garment at a ford - the garment is his own. Finally, three crones have cooked a dog on rowan spits which they trick him into eating, despite his gessa not to eat of his totem. The violation of a hero's gessa always signals his approaching death. However, a sad twist of fate is that they are often caught between two gessa, where either course of action will result in tragedy. Cuchulain was caught in this trap, for he was also under geis not to refuse the hospitality of a feast.

In the legend of 'The Destruction of Da Derga's hostel', we see how one by one king Conaire's somewhat bizarre gessa are systematically broken. One of these incidents is worth looking at in some detail: he must not allow one solitary man or woman to enter the house where he was staying after sunset. A lone woman dressed in a grey cloak comes to the door of the hostel after dark seeking hospitality from the king. She has a terrible appearance. While on the threshold of the house, and standing on one foot (the traditional stance of sorcerers) she chants thirty

two names by which she is known, amongst them Nemhain and Badb, goddesses of war. Thus she is the Goddess of death and destruction who takes many shapes upon herself and is known by many names.

Our heroes cannot die of old age - no Celtic hero wanted to die in his bed. Death in battle was seen as a death with honour. Warriors beaten in battle would crawl onto their shields to die, for their shield represented their home territory and the land of their tribe; it was important not to die on the land of strangers.

THE SPIRAL JOURNEY

The Celtic view of the journey through the five stages of life can be represented by the symbol of the double spiral. We begin, at our birth, at the centre point of the outward spiralling Universe, which is also our own centre point and our starting point on the journey. As we move onwards through tutelage we are unfolding in our developing potential. At the Love phase we reach our full maturity; we are like a flower that has fully opened in the midday sun. But just as everything in Nature ebbs and flows, so also do our lives. For with the passing of the Love phase towards that of Repose, we begin the second part of our journey, this time on the inward moving spiral - drawing us back to the centre, the source from which we came and to which we must return. And so we arrive in Death at the centre again, a new centre and a new beginning.

I make no apology if all this sounds metaphysical. This is one of the Mysteries that we each must pass through, for true understanding can only ever be gained through our own personal experience of life. There will always be problems to overcome, challenges to face; nothing of value is ever gained without some form of struggle! But we should welcome these challenges in our lives as opportunities to learn the Ancient Wisdom in all its beauty.

Copyright: 1992 Lorraine MacDonald
[First published in Dalriada magazine]

BLESSING THE WATER – JULY 25th, 2005

Check the site at -- <http://www.thank-water.net/english/index.htm>

Dr Emoto's research on water has shown clearly that our thoughts affect the way water responds... we can create change with our intention - offering love and gratitude to the water all over the world has the potential to bring harmony - something that is sorely needed in these days.

You might like to do something in your place.

Will you join us to say "I love you" and "Thank you" to all the water on Planet Earth and fill it with the highest vibration (HADO) of Love and Thanks that we can possibly experience?

Please join us to send our Love and Thanks to all the water in our physical body that has been sustaining and nurturing our lives on this planet. 70% of our body is made of water. We owe so much our health to the water in our body. Then, let us send our Love and Thanks to all the water on Planet Earth. 70% of the surface of the Earth is occupied by water. The environment on planet Earth is maintained by the water circulating in various forms. If it had not been for water, life would not have been created on planet Earth.

To make this event a global one, we have determined July 25 as "World Day of Love and Thanks to Water".

We have a vision that on this day, our Earth will be filled with beautiful golden/silver light of Love and Thanks that is flowing from the hearts of each and every one of us. Golden/silver light is the highest vibration in the range of visible light, and it will heal and cleanse all the water on earth, be it water of the ocean or that of our own body.

Copyright (c) 2003, Project of Love and Thanks to Water

The Eighth Australian Assembly will be held at Currarong NSW over October 28th, 29th, 30th. 2005

Where is Currarong?

Currarong is just 2 1/2 hours south of Sydney by car or train. Currarong is on the Northern arm of Jervis Bay and is about 32 km from Nowra, which is the nearest railway station. Transport to and from the station can be provided.

Currarong is a little fishing village of about 250 people.

It is situated on a peninsula and so is surrounded by bush and sea, National Park and Marine Park.
(www.currarong.info)

The accommodation will be over three or four houses, all close together. The Assembly will be held at one place. We have a cook and all meals will be catered.

Ceremonies will be conducted at different places on the peninsula, next to the sea in beautiful bush land settings.

Jervis Bay and the marine area off Currarong were once the sites of active volcanoes. Last year our Assembly was held at Kingaroy in Queensland, a place that is also the site of an ancient volcano. So it seems that at the moment we are working with dragon energy.

Because we are working on the peninsula I would like to theme the assembly and work with the element of water. As most of you know, water is fickle in Australia at the moment.

One workshop will be the factors or spirits that govern the element of water in this part of the world.

Members are invited to bring poems or writing they have on the element water, and of course anything else they would like to bring on any other topic.

An Assembly program has not yet been put together, but as we build it, this site will be updated.

A deposit of \$50.00 per person, (contact me regarding children) for the accommodation is necessary to secure the houses, so please try to have it to me by 1st of July. I can't guarantee a place without it.

Contact Carole Nielsen by email

phone 02 42954213

or at 3 Acacia St. Windang NSW 2528 Australia.

Up dates will be posted at www.carolenielsen.id.au

Username: gathering Password: druidsall



Hi Everyone,

Carole and I have put our heads together and wonder if, as the theme for this years Assembly is Water, we could make a Water Dragon of some kind. Perhaps a Celtic Water Dragon. In this way we can honour both the Spirit of place and the Ancestors.

So we are asking you all to research the Celtic Myths and come up with suggestions. Perhaps we can even build a simple labyrinth and perform a dragon dance. After our incredible performance of "Taliesin" last year we can justifiably be ambitious!

Get those thinking caps on and the ideas rolling in

Looking forward to seeing you all at Currarong.

Peace and Love,

Cherry



Children's Page!

The information below is for the Northern Hemisphere, but the principle still applies here in Aus. What birds are native to your area?

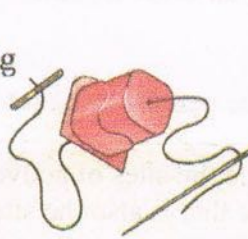
Birdwatching

It is hard for birds to find enough to eat in the winter, so you can help them by putting out food and water for them in your garden

Making bird pudding

You will need

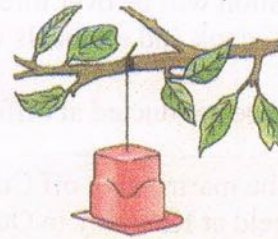
A yogurt pot
String
A big needle
Cooking fat
Breadcrumbs, oats and cooked potato



1. Thread the yogurt pot onto the string. Fill it with the cooked potato, breadcrumbs and oats.



2. Ask an adult to melt the fat. Pour it into the yogurt pot and mix it with everything else.



3. Leave the fat to set hard. Then hang the pot upside down from the piece of string.

Plants for birds

The plants shown below attract birds to a garden because they provide food. Shrubs and trees that produce berries in the autumn, such as rowan, crab apple, elder, and holly, are valuable sources of natural food for many birds.



Hawthorn



Groundsel



Rowan



Wild grasses



Cotoneaster



Elder



Thistle



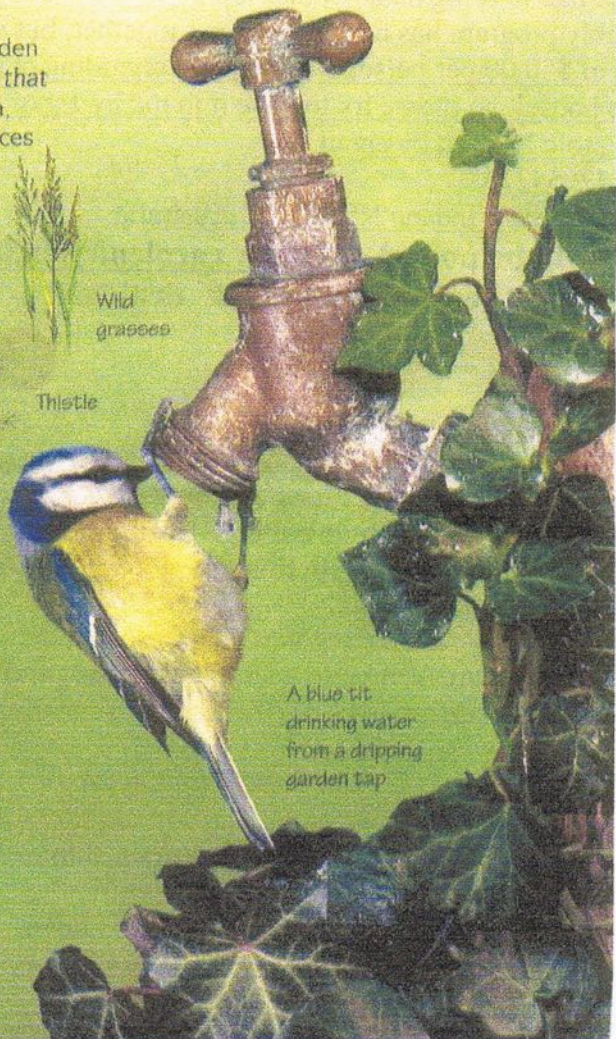
Female bullfinch on sunflower seedhead



Blackbird on ivy

Do not cut the seed heads off teasles, sunflowers and thistles in the winter as finches and other birds will feed on any seeds that are left. You can also put sunflower seeds out on your bird table.

Ivy climbs up walls and trees and is used as a nesting site by many birds. Its berries provide food in the winter.



A blue tit drinking water from a dripping garden tap