

## Imbolc 2010

Welcome to the Imbolc edition of **EOLAS**, the magazine of **Ord na Darach Gile - the Order of WhiteOak**. For those of us within the northern hemisphere, many still dealing with the snows and cold of winter, the knowledge of seeds beginning to stir deep within the womb of the earth and the great cycle of birth and rebirth beginning again is something to be celebrated. Our recent forced inactivity is almost at an end as we plan our work for the coming warmer seasons.

If anyone would like to contribute to future editions of EOLAS, please send your contributions to [membership@whiteoakdruids.org](mailto:membership@whiteoakdruids.org) - we are also keen to hear from you about your opinions on articles or important matters, so please feel free to write to us at the above email address for our Carnyx section.

Within the peace of the Oaks,  
J Craig Melia – January 2010

## Visit our Virtual Shrine

The Virtual Shrine Of The Goddess Brighid is dedicated to all people who are suffering and to their loved ones who are in need of help. It is also a place to celebrate and commemorate significant life passages. It is intended for the use of all People of Faith, here you may offer prayers, give thanks or write petitions within our Messages area.

We take our lead from the ancient and sacred places used by our Ancestors, those Ancient Shrines and Holy Wells that dot the landscape, allowing the traveller to give thanks and to make offering for safe journey and good fortune.

Our Blessings and Remembrance sections offer words of wisdom and prayers from many traditions, not just Celtic but also Northern Traditions, Hinduism and Buddhism.

The shrine can be viewed at [www.shrineofbrighid.com](http://www.shrineofbrighid.com)



The Order of WhiteOak has instituted a teaching program and system of fostership. For more details visit our website at [www.whiteoakdruids.org](http://www.whiteoakdruids.org) or email us via [membership@whiteoakdruids.org](mailto:membership@whiteoakdruids.org)

## The Gaining of Wisdom Salmon and Hazelnuts in Celtic Mythology

The gaining of poetic wisdom and magical knowledge features strongly within Celtic Mythological cycles. Within these tales hazelnuts and salmon frequently appear as vessels and bestowers of wisdom, predominantly within Irish mythology but also within its Bythonic counterpart.

It is interesting to note the similarity between the Gaelic word for nut “*cno*” and the word for wisdom “*cnocach*”. In the myths surrounding the forming of the Rivers Boyne and Shannon nine magical hazel trees surround an Otherworldly well, know as Conla’s Well or the Well of Segais, dropping their fruit into the waters below where they are eaten by the salmon who reside there.

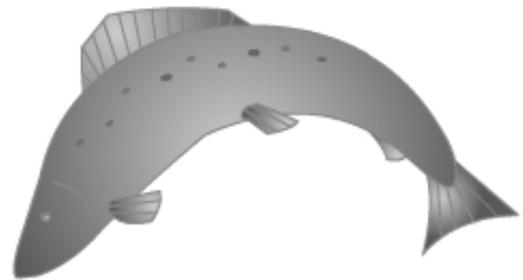
As told in the metrical *Dindshenchas* about the formation of the River Boyne only Nechtan (possibly another name for Nuada and cognate with the Welsh Nudd) and his three cupbearers were permitted to visit the Well, for should anyone else look into the well their eyes would burst within their head. When Boann, Nechtan’s wife, walks anti-clockwise around the well it overflows chasing the goddess to her death whilst at the same time forming the river which would bear her name.

In the tales about the formation of the Shannon, of which Conla’s Well is said to be the source, it is said that the well is surrounded by nine hazel trees which magically produce leaves, nuts and flowers simultaneously.

In all of these tales, after the well brakes forth to drown the respective goodesses who henceforth gave their name to the rivers formed, the salmon are released into the world to be sought by those seeking wisdom. These salmon are usually described as been specked indicating a connection with the Otherworld. The number of spots on the salmon were said to be indicative as to how many nuts they had consumed.

In the story of Fionn mac Cumhail the young Fionn is charged with cooking the freshly caught Salmon of Knowledge by the Druid Finnece. During cooking three drops burnt his thumb, which he instinctively thrust into his mouth, (possibly linked to the practice of Teinm Laida), and so received the wisdom of the salmon for himself.

Although the cauldron appears more often as a vessel of wisdom in Welsh mythology there are still numerous references to the salmon as a custodian of wisdom. Despite the many parellels with the story of Fionn, including three drops, burnt fingers, a youth, gaining wisdom intended for his master, it is the Cauldron that is the source of Gwion Bach’s wisdom, although it is an interesting link that the youngst reborn as Taliesin was discovered within a salmon-weir by Elphin.



The wisdom gained by Fionn is mostly prophetic in nature whilst Taliesin gains poetic inspiration (Awen). In Cormac’s Glossary there is reference to the “nuts of imbas” (Cuill Crimaind) which have been suggested as a process for the acquisition of imbas. The practice of Dichetal do Chennaib is sometimes translated as “cracking open the nuts of wisdom”.

The Salmon was long held to be the oldest, and therefore wisest of the animals. From the Book of Lismore:

A year for the stake,  
Three years for the field,  
Three lifetimes of the field for the hound,  
Three lifetimes of the hound for the horse,  
Three lifetimes of the horse for the human being,  
Three lifetimes of the human being for the stag,  
Three lifetimes of the stag for the ousel,  
Three lifetimes of the ousel for the eagle,  
Three lifetimes of the eagle for the salmon,  
Three lifetimes of the salmon for the yew,  
Three lifetimes of the yew for the world  
from its begining to end.

In the tale of Kulhwch and Olwen the salmon of Lyn Llyw, located close to the River Severn, appears at the end of a lengthy list of creatures as both the oldest and the wisest, and the only one who can tell of the whereabouts of Mabon, son of Modron.

A depiction of the god Nudd (Nodens) found within the temple complex at Lydney Park in Gloucestershire shows a figure (probably the god Nudd himself) catching a salmon again from the nearby River Severn. Two statues dedicated to Nudd were discovered at a Romano-British temple at Cockersand Moss in Lancashire located near the mouth of the River Lune. That these two locations overlook the estuaries of rivers is of particular significance, as is the association Nudd has with both the sea and fishing, as well as healing.

It should be noted that the ultimate source of wisdom within the Celtic Myths is the Otherworld. Within Echtra tales the hero frequently returns to his people with knowledge or exquisite gifts from the Land of Eternal Youth. The well, which serves quite literally as the wellspring of inspiration, serves as the liminal entrance to the Otherworld.

As modern day practitioners of Celtic Polytheism we turn to the sacred symbolism held within these tales for the tools of our practice. The quest for wisdom is something that should be a major driving force in our lives. Wisdom is attained, in good Celtic fashion, through the joining of two things to create a third, in this case the fusion of knowledge with experience.

The gaining of poetic inspiration and spiritual enlightenment is a story of transformation, of death and rebirth, of the breakdown of old forms allowing for the creation of the new. How now do we grasp the slippery, speckled form of the salmon from the streams of inspiration? How now do we distill its essence from the steaming brew within the cauldron of wisdom?

J Craig Melia - December 2009

### **The Canopy of Night – Tony the Prof**

Gather darkness, shadows, eventide  
The twilight deepens, Aten, Sun god, died  
Storm clouds cover the land, black canopy  
Mist over meadows, now I cannot see

Swiftly our life ebbs, at the close of day  
Mine eyes grow dim, all senses pass away  
Death and decay, an end we cannot flee  
In fleeting shadows, now I cannot see

I miss all times with you, every single hour  
But there is no return, no means, no power  
Yet by delusion, only pale shades of thee  
Mist over meadows, now I cannot see

I fear no foe, nothing of death's sweet caress  
Sorrow and joy abide, and tears not bitterness.  
Where is death's sting? A funeral pyre for me  
In fleeting shadows, now I cannot see

Heart ends, breath stops, a closing of the eyes  
And then we'll soar beyond the farthest skies  
After night, dawn breaks, and all storm clouds flee  
Morning has broken, now we together see

## Understanding Trees – Andy Baggott

I have been walking a Celtic spiritual path for over twenty years and have spent a great deal of that time seeking an understanding of the true nature of trees. The ancient Druids had a deep reverence and connection with trees, one that went beyond the realms of this physical reality.

Trees are wisdom keepers and spiritual guides whose knowledge has been passed down through thousands of generations. They help us to make a stronger connection with creation and facilitate our alignment with the universal energies; so that we can match our microcosm (our body, mind and spirit) with the macrocosm (the universe).

When this alignment of energies between microcosm and macrocosm takes place, we step out of four-dimensional reality and into the Celtic Otherworld-the realm of magic and infinite possibilities.

I am blessed to live close to ancient woodlands and have spent many hours walking the well trodden paths through these beautiful, enchanted places, which probably date back to at least the time of the Celts.

Each piece of woodland has its own unique character but all share a sense of tranquility, great beauty and mystery. The woodlands take on different characters with the turning seasons and are always vibrant with new growth even in the apparent dead of winter. They are inhabited by a wide range of birds, mammals and insects as well as a rich variety of herbs and fungi. The ancient woodlands provide a veritable medicine chest of healing remedies.

In the Celtic tradition, each tree has its own wisdom to impart to those willing to still themselves and listen. One can learn a great deal just from studying the different characters trees. The oak is renowned for its strength, the willow for its flexibility and so on. The Celtic Ogham gives further insights relating each tree to a colour and bird. However, there is only one way to gain a true understanding of these great tree beings and that is to spend time with them.

If you spend time in ancient woodland, you begin to notice certain things that are not usually mentioned in books about trees. For instance, it is quite common to find holly bushes surrounding solitary oak trees, as if protecting them.



At other times you might find young oaks and holly growing side by side. They seem to have a powerful interaction throughout their life cycles. Hawthorn has a great propensity for growing at the junctions and crossroads of pathways. They are in fact the ancient equivalent to our modern sat nav if you can understand their language.

To be able to communicate with trees takes nothing more than practice, stilling yourself to hear the whispers of their wisdom. It requires you to build a relationship with a tree in the same manner in which you might build a relationship with another human being. It starts with simple communication and gradually builds. With time the communication becomes deeper and alongside it, the mutual understanding. One of the most important things to remember is that the passage of time for a tree is often very different from our human experience.



A yew, oak or coppiced hazel can live well in excess of 1500 years. That's 20 times longer than the average human life span. This means that to begin to understand time from a tree's perspective, you should view your time as a twentieth of what it actually is.

Spending 20 minutes with a tree might seem like a long time to you, but to the tree it might be the equivalent of only a moment in time. It is difficult to develop a deep relationship with anything if you only spend the equivalent of a minute together every once in a while.

Part of the reason, I believe, for the very long training that was required to become a Druid was due to the amount of hours needed to be spent making a true connection with nature. On my own path I spent three years regularly visiting a specific ancient yew tree and honouring it with salt and offerings before I received any acknowledgement from the tree of my existence. However, once that connection was made, it remained and has been a powerful source of insight and illumination.

Trees are amazing beings. They have an ancient line of wisdom that has been passed down from generation to generation fully intact. They have seen many changes on this planet over many millennia and have navigated them all. I believe in these changing times, they have much to share with us if we can open our minds and hearts to their teaching.

Why not find a tree near you and spend some time getting to know it? Make that connection. Visit it as often as you can; make a simple offering of salt at its base or whatever feels good to you to honour its wisdom. Sit with your back against it, close your eyes and open your heart and mind.

One day it will speak to you and what it has to say will thrill and amaze you.



**Andy Baggott** is a healer and practicing shaman of the Celtic and pre-Celtic Tradition. He is author of many books including *The Celtic Wheel of Life* and *Ogham-The Celtic Oracle*. For more information about his work see [www.andybaggott.com](http://www.andybaggott.com)

## Coming Spring – Tony the Prof

Now the green blade rises, from the buried grain,  
East brings the cold winds, and the freezing rain  
Love lives again, with feathered touch unseen  
Opening the east, comes time to spring up green.

In funeral pyre now burning, and beyond all pain  
South brings the fires, ends where death has slain  
Ashes scatter on the wind, incense sweet and clean  
Opening the south, after firestorm, spring up green

Now the green blade rises, from the buried grain,  
West brings the snowfall, and then thaws to rain  
Love lives again, with pure water bubbling clean  
Opening the east, herbs now spring up green.

When our hearts are saddened, grieving or in pain,  
North brings forth rich soil, winter's gods are slain  
Salt brings its flavour, light of the world now seen  
Opening the north, like wheat that springs up green.

## Down (a bucket down Brigit's Well)

Her voice broke apart my sleep  
with a sharp white crack  
which rumbled down to water,  
blue slippers dancing on my head.

My dreaming mind revised  
the first line all night as I tossed  
until I woke with it too heavy  
and ripe on my tongue.

Here it seems like narrative  
but really it's a poem, one note's  
fall through registers  
down into immense wet measure,

resounding in whale's testes  
the bells of my buried cathedral  
tolling wild through the woods,  
nightmaring this fillie nib.

She sent a blueblack Om  
from the Sidhe of her wave,  
vowel onto consonant  
like an owl alighting on the dolmen  
which mobiles the starry consternations  
round the sharp horns of late moon.

Her kiss is like that, fresh  
and dangerous, squeezing out  
bolts in the wave's pent collapse,  
enervating every psalm in the room  
with a calamitous hard boom.

My exult I cannot explain  
much less espouse or expunge  
but simply sing back

starry in blue swash, dazed  
from her blessing  
even as it ebbs from my mouth.

And when I turn out the light  
to lay on the couch  
with the garden breathing  
wet and thickly in the breeze

she returned from the sea  
to whisper the single word  
I couldn't name: Birth,

the end of all poems,  
delved at last, free  
to splutter and discover

a new wet country,  
a fresh inquiry,  
dark and glistening  
as the late night,

still cauled in her  
ocean afterbirth,  
a plenteous blue slick  
she cleans with her tongue.

I open my eyes so  
slowly and faint,  
inexpressibly on this  
first of last shores,

awake and athirst for milk  
from breasts I can't see  
though I know they are close,  
downy and heavy and round

exactly where I ache most  
to I pull the cup to my lips  
and thus begin.

Putting an end to singing  
of the singer who  
refuses to be fed, who  
keeps writing the word  
badly -- as Death --  
ever rounding his  
ever-cold bed.

Brendan MacOdrum



Hello EOLAS Readers,

It is with great joy and anticipation that we present our newest addition to EOLAS, a feature that we have entitled '**Carnyx**'. More than simply a "*Letters to the Editor*" feature, it is a forum for you, the reader, to have a voice in what this publication is able to become, what issues you would like to see addressed, and an opportunity to vent your joys and/or frustrations with the modern expression of Celtic spirituality.

As many of you will already know, the carnyx was a 1-2 meter long valveless horn made from beaten bronze that was used by the Iron Age Celts. It appears to have been a pan-Celtic instrument with evidence of use in Britain, and across the continent with the most eastern representation of a carnyx in a depiction on the great Stupa of Sanchi, India.

The bell of the carnyx is based on the head of a particular animal; serpents, fish, birds, wolves, horses, donkeys and wild boar are favorite choices. The earliest depiction portrays the head of a dragon and can be found on the Aetolian victory coins of the third century, BC. The German archaeologist, Friedrich Behn, considered that the bell's shape was a significant and distinguishing feature for a Celtic Clan.

Even though the Carnyx is regarded as a musical instrument, its sound is described as harsh, and very loud, its use being to create both a "call to arms" for the warriors of a clan, a rallying cry before and during and after a battle as well as a likely psychological tool to strike fear into the heart of the enemy. Here at EOLAS, we are proud to present this new feature as a rallying cry for the ideas and participation of our readership. As an icebreaker for Carnyx, I would propose the following question, "What, if any, role do you feel that transmission of spiritual knowledge through a lineage, either familial, or through apprenticeships/fosterships, has played in your own personal spiritual development, and how important do you feel such opportunities are in the further development of Contemporary Celtic Spirituality?"

I am looking forward to a lively and engaging new feature in Carnyx, please submit your correspondence to [EOLAS@whiteoakdruids.org](mailto:EOLAS@whiteoakdruids.org)

Kenneth

## Blue Moon: An *imbas* for the Festival of Brigit - Brendan MacOdrum

(Note: What proceeds is one seeker's *imbas* on a sacred theme, scholarly enough yet taking poetic license with the facts in the hopes of dowsing for and rousing their greater, older meanings. I'm sticking my finger in a blue moon in the hopes of learning something deeper about the nurture and nature of Brigit, in whose honor the festival of Imbolc is celebrated on Feb. 2. Apologies to those whose learning and wisdom far exceed my own for taking this license, but I do believe the words rise from a creative well sacred to Her.)

On December 31, 2009, the Gregorian year passed, as did the first decade of the twentieth century in our latter-day calendar. It's a widely secular enough event, in for secular American culture, old Father Time with his long white beard and sickle passing the responsibility of events to the a Reubeneque pink and rotund infant, greeted by the endless cheers of celebrants lifting their champagne glasses and tooting toy horns in across the vast necropolis of suburbia.

Celebrations that night bore only the faintest phosphor of the old New Year's celebrations, whether that be the Celtic Day of the Dead on Samhain or the end of the Roman Saturnalia: and yet, in past and present alike is the identification of the New Year with a mewling babe nascent with all the hopes and dreams of a new year which hopefully will better than the last year (and decade) (and century). Some things never change, not, at least, in the human heart.

My wife and I were awakened round midnight: not by the usual staccato bursts of firecrackers and hoots and shouts from drunken revelers up and down our block (which we usually sleep through), but the voice of some guy erupted out the front door of the rental down the street, obviously more blotto than the rest, who began hollering at top volume about how desperately he needed to do the nasty with someone's sister; then proclaimed, to his girlfriend or the neighborhood or the night or God or the Goddess, that he'd take on anybody, anybody at all, who was man enough to fight.

The arc of this poor jerk's night was evident: jocose, clamorose, amorose, bellicose, probably soon lachymorose and eventually comatose. Certainly the guy was earnest, even if he was in a blackout. I can't help but wonder if a soul crying out in darkness is one who is desperately in need of the old connections, settling, as we moderns must, for approximations and distillations. Any old bottle, babe, opponent and will do these days when drunkenness is just one of many trace elements of the old magnitude and awe and augment which we worshipped at the altar of gods.

Fortunately for my wife and I and our cats--all of whose sleep has been broken by that drunk's pungent annunciations-- it soon began raining, sending the revelers of 2009 inside to 2010 and ushering in a cold front which has, for the past week, walloped Florida with the worst boreal havoc in modern memory. It might even snow tonight.

Yet it's important to remember that December 31 was also candled by a full moon, and a "blue moon" at that, the second full moon to fall within the month of December. Blue moons are rare events, occurring once every two to three years; since the solar year has about eleven more days a year than the old lunar calendar, there comes a time when the moon waxes twice in a month.



These moons are “blue” because they’re slippery, they defy the order, come out of the blue, so to speak (when it fell close to Lent, early Christians called the occurrence a belewe or “betrayor” moon). Blue moons are an annoying fix for a system which wasn’t as pure a gold as its fashioners proclaimed when they devoutly replaced the old matriarchal lunar calendar, ruled by a triple goddess with powers of night and water and the unconscious.

And in the old reckoning, there would be no blue moon, since its calendar was calibrated to the cycles of the moon.

But what of this term for us, this “blue” moon and its random, disruptive presence in one calendar and absence in the former one? I watched this moon build toward full on nights in late December, when the night has a hardness to it, a depth of darkness tied to its proximity to the winter solstice: How brightly that moon waxed; how weirdly, too, like a powerful ghost of the old dispensation, lowering the zipper between the worlds with its lucence, widening an entrance to the Otherworld, at least this meditation, soaking it in the deep well-waters of a Sidhe where the Goddess still burns and thrives and bestows.

“Blue” full moons fool with our reckoning, as full moons mess with our sensible minds, causing, at their high tide, the old church graveyard to split, right there next to the ancient yew, and delve up Bride or Brigit, ur-mother of St. Brigid, the goddess who refused to fade in the solar certainties of Christianity, become the midwife of Mary and the foster-mother of Christ..

That goddess was not one, but three, with triune aspects much as the moon is triple in its monthly evolution, at once maiden, matron and crone. According to Cormac’s ninth-century Glossary, Brigit, daughter of the Dagda, is described as “a poetess ... a goddess whom poets worshipped,” and having two sisters, also divine and having the same name as herself, women of healing and of smith-work respectively.

Brigit is fundamentally a goddess of elevated states – her name means “exalted one” and, according to Cormac’s Glossary, is associated with high dimensions, such as high-rising flames, highlands, hill-forts and upland areas. Her brightness is also associated with states conceived as psychologically lofty and elevated, such as wisdom, excellence, perfection, high intelligence, poetic eloquence, craftsmanship (especially blacksmithing), healing ability, druidic knowledge and skill in warfare. And her brightness shines in the domestic home and hearth, a goddess of fertility, purification and birth.

Her candescence something to behold, radiating from something full-mooned within her, reflecting in full measure a light which would immolate us were we to try looking at it with our naked, mortal eyes. Her light is the divine spark of inspiration in the poet’s imagination; the candle burning through the winter’s night; the glow of life in the stirring womb. All through the winter – even or especially on nights like this—she comforts and succors with her pale, soft light, basting the darkness with blue-white milk. What is the Gaelic word for it? – dubluachair meaning “midwinter” and “blackbrightness” with luachair meaning the rushes which are integral to La Fheile Bride, the festival of St. Brigit. (In the prayer or charm called the Buarach Tahlil, rushes from a riverbank between towns are wrapped around the legs of a cow which can’t give milk and the mercy of St. Brigid is invoked, causing the milk to flow. The word imbolc has ties to milking of the calves – “in the belly” meaning pregnancy and lactation.)

Brigit was one of the great deities to readily survive into the Christian era (as would Manannan as St. Michael and Lugh, possibly, as St. Brendan), becoming St. Brigid, her feast day of Feb. 2 founded on the old Celtic cross-quarter lunar festival of Imbolc. The essences of the ancient goddess readily translated into Christian ritual, the old groves become the saint’s sanctuary. (Around 470 St. Brigid founded Kildare Abbey, a double monastery, for nuns and monks, on the plains of Cill-Dara, “the church of the oak”, her cell being made under a large oak tree.). At her shrine a sacred flame was tended for centuries until Henry VIII ordered it doused, him being of the disposition for sousing in and then dousing a number of mortal women’s flames.

What is it about the blue moon which has that same “blackbrightness” of Brigit? One of my favorite tales of Brigit comes from County Galway, cited in “The Festival of St. Brigit the Holy Woman,” (Celtica 23, 1999):

“The Blessed Virgin was about to be ‘churched’ and as she was going to the church, she met St. Brigit. Our Blessed Lady was very shy about going to the altar rails before the whole congregation and she told Brigit how she felt. ‘Nevermind,’ says Brigit. ‘I’ll manage that part all right.’ She got a harrow and put it on her head, turning the points upwards. They went into the church and no sooner had St. Brigit entered than every point of the harrow turned into a lighted candle. The whole congregation turned their eyes on St. Brigit and her crown of lighted candles and the Blessed Virgin proceeded to the altar rails and not an eye was turned on her until the ceremony was over. The Blessed Virgin was so delighted with St. Brigit that she gave her her day before her own, and that is the reason that St. Brigit’s Day is before the feast of Purification.”

Seamus O’Cathain comments, “By the spectacular assumption of a harrow candelabrum on her head, Brigit is, in effect, cast as a ‘light mother’ to Mary, a position which confers upon her the honored status of midwife par excellence, making her the perfect role model for any ordinary country midwife or ‘handy woman.’”

Light woman, midwife, harrower of a darkened sanctuary, most recently a church but before then an hallow ringed by oaks: fructification and birth is the flame Brigit tenders, and her festival of Imbolc marks the transformation of winter into spring. Out of death, life: from cold wastes, the greening field; from barren spaces, the mewling of lambs. The spark of life, her candle, endures.

So when I observe that big brilliance in the sky, I am comforted in ways I can hardly name, united with an regenerated by an ancient legacy through the wyrd radiance of an earth-bound, heavenly orb which has brought augment and mystery and wildness and beauty into my life over the year. Last December’s blue moon which bridged into the New Year— the one that doesn’t fit in anyone’s reckoning—bespeaks of a knowledge between the worlds, coming from a height which somehow seems to reside deep within, inspiring the mind to dowse down an old, old well, in search of the full magnitude of Brigit’s presence inside this day.

The imbas of my assay – call it poetic license, or critical thought somewhat intoxicated by its theme – keeps me dowsing through the sources, driven on by the trope of a blue moon on New Year’s Eve. I shouldn’t apologize, because the distinction between the poetic and scholarly mind is a latter-day ascription, with the poetic relegated to off-duty ruminations and private matins, not meant for general consumption. Alwyn Rees and Brinley Rees write in Celtic Heritage:

In Welsh, the very word for ‘meaning’ (ystr) comes from the Latin historia which has given the English language both “story” and “history.” “History” has now been emptied of most of the extra-historical context of historia, which derives from a root meaning “knowing,” “learning,” “wise man,” “judge.” The old Welsh word for “story,” cyfarwyddyd, means “guidance,” “direction,” “instruction,” “knowledge,” “skill,” or “prescription.” Its stem, arwydd, means “sign,” “symbol,” “manifestation,” “omen,” or “miracle,” and derives from a root meaning “to see.” The storyteller (cyfarwdd) was originally a seer and a teacher who guided the souls of his hearers through the world of “mystery.” (212)

Bathed in the gentle lactile phosphor of that irreverent, irrelevant moon, I am graced with an imbas which leads me to the place where history and mystery are one.

I can’t help but wonder if we moderns have to dowse to the old truths through a stratum of solar history we’re stuck with, like the crowded teeth and myopic eyes our so-far-evolved homo sapiens jaws. We have become over-conscious, too attenuated to the light, our city lights burning so brightly at night as to occlude the starry night, making of moon-magic a childish thing, myth

become folktale become, at its most desecrate, urban myth, the provenance of the killer psychos of contemporary horror films where the twists are out of the torture of psyche, the moonlight is “bald and wild,” as Sylvia Plath presented it in her poem “The Moon And The Yew Tree.” Naked death bereft of meaning is the nihilistic and sadistic “entertainment” found in many current horror films, even their sexual themes diminished to the pleasures of a snuff film.

Locating tonight's blue moon across the calendar divide which separates lunar from solar consciousness -- back to old dispensation--is, I think, symbolic of the work of transforming modernity into a fertile neo-paganism. Eric Neumann writes in *The Origins and History of Consciousness*

Every culture-hero has achieved a synthesis between consciousness and the creative unconscious. He has found within himself the fruitful center, the point of renewal and rebirth which, in the New Year fertility festival, is identified with the creative divinity, and upon which the continued existence of the world depends. This is what the rite -- and through it, mankind -- ‘means’: about this knowledge of the creative point, of the buried treasure which is the water of life, immortality, fertility and the afterlife all rolled into one, the aspirations of mankind unwearyingly revolve. A constellation of this point is not a “reproduction” of nature, but a genuine creation, and the symbolic recitation of the story of creation at the new year has its rightful place at this point. The inner object of ritual is not the natural process, but the control of nature through the correspondingly creative element in man. (212)

Ritual turns of the Great Year – as Imbolc ends the hard cycle of darkest winter and begins the process which brings life back to earth—are thus immensely fertile for soul and psyche, enabling us access to sacred knowledge which raises us to the fullness of life. So much for beer and bowl games: our recent blue moon ensured a towering belfry to ring Brigit’s note across the land.

(Apologies for the conventional masculine case there. Our Theme is anything but a man’s mystery Brigit’s flame was tended by nine vestals and may have been forbidden for any man to witness. Even my writing of Her here may be acrid with the tang of sacrilege, though my namesake is related to an ancient consort of hers, and my discourse is in Her style, so I continue to tug away at these wise milch-teats, happy that the milk yet flows ...)

Why else be there gods, other than to harrow and hallow the soul of the human with depth and magnitude? To show us how far the winding stair descends down St. Brigit’s well (many still survive around Ireland), St. Brigit’s purifying crown of candelabra begins to morph into an older head-piece, shaped like the bull-horns of Cernunnos, Lord of the Forest and green-sword consort of the goddess in her Matron aspect. (Lammas and Imbolc are equidistant lovers, with Lugh another of Brigit’s lovers.) St. Brigit’s midwifery has an earlier source, too, not at birth but conception, the spark of life which leaps from cream to butter in the act of churning, well-goddess and stag-god united through the fomenting offices of churn (cuinneg) and churn-dash (loine), sparked by the holy flame of Brigit, brought term through the darkness of winter, delved mewling and thirsty to the breast which bastes all with the milky light of them moon.

Which is exactly what my sad drunken friend was surely looking for, out there at the crack of midnight on the secular New Year’s Eve, blue moon hidden above a scud of threatening clouds, the poor fuck (“to churn” related to German ficken and its English equivalent of “to fuck”) hollering at a moon he can’t see, in an age which has blinded itself with its own light, far inside and away from the perilous influence of full moonlight.

And who’s to say our looped neighbor wasn’t unconsciously repeating one of the rituals of the Festival of St. Brigid, itself an repetition of the old Celtic festival, rites which repeatedly churned a mythologem into sustaining truth? O’Caithin tells of a “chain of symbolic actions” during the festival which

begins with a male partner – the man of the house – seeking admission to his house in the name of Brigit. He orders those within to go on their knees, open their eyes and admit Brigit – in other words, to be prepared to submit themselves to the process of insemination and possible impregnation through the good offices of the goddess who rules over such matters. The commencement is gladly welcomed by those within. (257)

That blotto'd dude (“asshole” was what my wife called him, turning back to her sleep) was still singing the old song, as clueless as his small-town audience was as to whence it came from. Surely far beyond the bottom of whatever bottle he tried to fully empty that night: the well goes far, far deeper than that. I have to give him a single brownie point for trying, no matter how unconsciously. We may have forgotten where the cables descend to in our psyches, but that’s not to say the wiring –and desire– isn’t still operative.

Who remembers the Rogers and Hart ballad “Blue Moon”? It was the title song written for Manhattan Melodrama in 1934 and sung, for odd reasons, by Shirley Ross in blackface, perhaps unscoring the oddity of its sentiment, that of finding a love so luckily and strangely that it could only be sung to a blue moon. The song was not a hit at the time, but since, crooners and torch-singers ranging from Louis Armstrong to Belle Baker to Frank Sinatra to Sam Cooke to The Cowboy Junkies have had a crack at it. (Bruce Willis and Cybill Shepherd sang it as a duet in an episode of “Moonlighting”)

Now, my drunken comrade didn’t take a crack at singing “Blue Moon,” but surely the song was mid-deep in his words, a modern’s take on an old prayer, composed in our terribly broken, heartily confused and overly certain manner, yet still offered to the goddess who purifies and fertilizes our hearts, marrying churn and churn-dash with a fructifying, hearth-sustaining kiss.

Blue Moon, you saw me standing alone,  
Without a dream in my heart,  
Without a love of my own,  
Blue moon, you knew just what I was there for,  
You heard me saying a prayer for,  
Someone I could care for,

And then there suddenly appeared before me,  
Someone my arms could really hold,  
I heard you whisper "Darling please adore me,"  
And when I looked to the moon it had turned to gold,

And what does my imbasadd to tale of one profane night before the Gregogian New Year? Just this note of blue silver dripping from an odd moon, a taste of something incredibly old and wild and fructive—out of nowhere, freakish as blue moon, as if up from the ground or a well or out of an oak or sprung from the ruins of a monestery or walked up from the tide of the everyday. It’s enough for me, today, though its so cold outside, and hope for this world and its future is small. And so I join in on the refrain:

Blue moon, now I'm no longer alone,  
Without a dream in my heart,  
Without a love of my own.

Blue moon ... odd orb, out of place and time, fading surely now into the darkness which will eventually will yield the full moon of Imbolc which waxes on January 30. As the old year's blue moon fades, dusting silver of an ever-more distant candescence on the roofs and pathways of this small freezing town in Central Florida, lunar lyrics of one century flow back and back to charms of a far distant age, unalloyed and permanent in the hopes and dreams of every human heart as winter cusps and is midwifed into the milk-tide of the new:

Brigid, weave your circle bright  
Spin a web of glowing light  
Earth and air and fire and water  
Bind us to you

Sources:

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## Mo Anam Cara – Caur 2009

Could it be true?  
Could this be real?  
Where did you come from?  
How did this begin?  
One moment alone,  
the next in my heart.  
As if always together our  
talks seem so normal, as is if  
always together our minds share thoughts.  
I can not answer how this came to be,  
but forever and always  
you will be  
Mo Anam Cara

## A Storm – Caur 2009

Alone I stand on a road not known.  
A Storm appears on the horizon of my soul  
as if it sees me A Storm comes forth like a shot.

A Storm rages and roars and buffets me with emotions and realities.  
My mind wrestles with thoughts alien to me.  
A Storm has shattered the depths of my naked core.

Winds batter, thunder quakes  
energies smash, lightning cascades darkness,  
What was once my home has vanished in a current of agony.  
Something rises through the tendrils of my soul,  
thrashing and screaming, fighting to be free.

Unrecognizable but yet I know  
This storm has released a freedom in me.  
Not humble, not shy,  
not a pretender, not prone to lie.  
Not afraid of what people may think.  
Not afraid to be what should be.  
Slowly, then fast the wind tears away  
weakness, regrets and memories of an unfortunate past.

Sorrow, shame, anger and fear fall into a chasm of putrid dismay.  
When did it start? What made it begin?  
the faking and begging to please,  
this false shell of a man I used to be.  
My starved spirit adsorbs A Storm, taking it in, making me whole.  
Feelings once unknown flourish as if grown new.

I begin to cry, not from sorrow, not from pain, not from loneliness,  
not from pity, nor from regret.  
Tears of joy for finally feeling what is to be me.  
To you my Storm I give my thanks and devotion  
I will forever call you friend and always will you be part of me.

## A DRUID IN IRAQ

Greetings Friends,

I again find myself in the sands of Iraq. This time, however, I dwell in a JSS (Joint Security Station) Ash Shurah, which is just outside a the small town of ash Shurah, several tens of miles south of Mosul. The weather is cooler than what I experienced last time. There is much more greenery and farming. The locals do not seem too happy with our presence but have yet to make any violent gestures toward us.

I think they, like the rest of humanity, just want to be left alone and live their lives. They seem unconcerned with the intricacies of world politics. Their beliefs are theirs and none has a right to judge them. Truth to all of it but I pray none chooses to hurt another over it. That is the story of history I think.

Our mission is simply to assist the Iraqi Police and Army in any missions they require. It is simple enough. Personally my role has changed as well. I no longer am free to lead a team or squad on patrols. I now am the company TOC (Tactical Operations Center) NCOIC (Non-Commissioned Officer In Charge). This means I am in charge a room full of radios, computer screens and surveillance cameras for twelve hours a day. The purpose of this is to ensure that we can communicate with, and assist any our platoons that are out on missions should something not so nice happen. I must admit that the warrior in me is SCREAMING to get out of this cage, as I call it, not so much to get into a fight as to just get out an be among my element.

Since the coming of my storm I feel more strength in my religion and more in myself. Evidently this must be showing as every Pagan in this JSS has approached me an asked to talk about our shared beliefs. While I have yet to meet a fellow Druid I am finding that all pagan faiths are more family than not and I find strength and joy in our conversations. I must admit that there are not many of us, I can not remember the last time I was in a room with so many pagans other than myself. We are trying to set some time apart to have meetings and let everyone express their beliefs, we will see how it works as time is tough to find and we are an odd element on the JSS.

Accommodations are not as bad as last time, either. We actually have showers and if the cooks choose, three hot meals a day. Our rooms are large eight main wooden buildings. A bit scary as they locals have been known to drop mortars on our small camp.

For now things remain quiet. With luck it will remain so. Until next time my friends sleep well and cherish the live you have. There is much goodness and beauty in it.

- Caur 2009

## **Crafting Magick with Pen and Ink**

**Susan Pesznecker**

**Llewellyn Publications**

**ISBN 978-0738711454**

### **A Review by J Craig Melia**

I'm at a bit of a loss for words at how to describe this book. The book itself is a revelation, in all truth I'm not sure exactly what I expected on receiving the book, but it has very quickly become one of those books that I will constantly be dipping into.

With practical tips and techniques to breathe life and energy into your writing "Crafting Magick" provides every budding (and experienced) writer with the tools to allow your creativity to flow. But this book is so much more than that.

The key word for me is "craft" (in multiple uses of the term) and this is what is at the heart of this wonderful book. The links between the written word and magick are there for all to see, but the realisation that our written work requires craftsmanship and should be seen as an artform in its own right seems to have become lost to modern thinking. Maybe that is in part to how the written word is accessed in these times, the opening chapter of the book makes a valid point about writing as an "inherently magickal act" that many readers will instantly connect with.

This book is not just for those of us who practice magick, I would recommend this book to non-practitioners too, especially those of school age as well as older students. The book is clear, concise and easy to understand even for the novice. The exercises given at the end of each chapter really helps the student to understand and 'feel' what they are doing.

This is a book that has been sadly missing within books of a magickal nature and would benefit beginners and more seasoned practitioners alike. In crafting your magickal and even your more mundane writings this should be your first and last reference point.

The author Susan Pesznecker teaches writing at Portland State University and Clackamas Community College, and her love of the written word shines through every page. This should be a book that sits, well thumbed, on everyone's shelf.

