

Lughnasadh 2008

Welcome to the Lughnasadh edition of EOLAS, the magazine of Ord na Darach Gile - the Order of WhiteOak.

Tempus Fugit. Believe it or not it's a whole year on from our inaugurate edition of EOLAS, and hopefully we are maintaining the same level within our varied pieces for those interested in the Druidic world. This month we have an article on Druid Plant Lore from Phillip Carr-Gomm, as well as our usual mix of articles, poems, recipes, reviews and snippets of interest.

The WhiteOak (Ord na Darach Gile) Lughnasadh Druid Conclave to be held in Western Massachusetts during August 15th - 17th. More details are covered below.

If anyone would like to contribute to future editions of EOLAS, please send your contributions to membership@whiteoakdruids.org

Within the peace of the Oaks,
J Craig Melia – July 2008

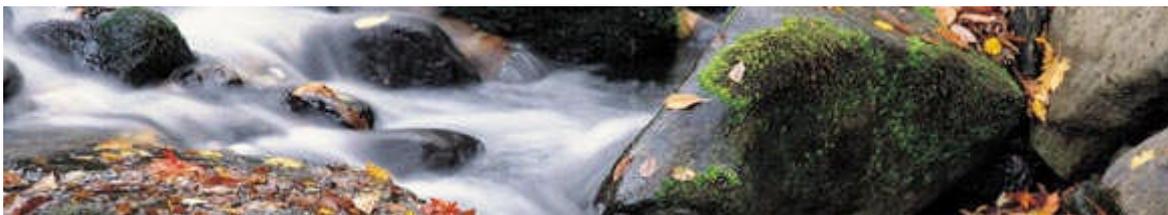
Visit our Virtual Shrine

The Virtual Shrine Of The Goddess Brigid 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.celticheritage.co.uk/virtualshrine



The Order of WhiteOak has instituted a teaching program and system of fostership. For more details visit our website at www.whiteoakdruids.org or email us via membership@whiteoakdruids.org

DRUID PLANT LORE

“Gwydion it was who with great magic from his wand of enchantment flung fire among the nine forms of elements, so that they combined into a wondrous growth: essence of rich soils, water of the ninth wave, Primroses of the hillside, bloom of woods and trees.”

The Coming of the King, Nikolai Tolstoy

Working with plants in a sacred or magical way lies at the heart of indigenous spiritualities and earth religions. Many of us are drawn to these ‘Old Ways’ because they combine a sense of deep spirituality with a love for the Earth and Her creatures. In the recent past, though, Druids have been hesitant about discussing plant lore, since scholars would point out that we only had Pliny’s references to four of the plants used by the Druids and that was it. And yet reading the old stories – of Diancecht, Miach and Airmid, for example – and thinking about the way in which tribal cultures use plants, we realise that the Druids must have steeped themselves in plant lore. But is there any way we can attempt to piece together what that lore might have been?

I first became interested in the Druid path about forty years ago. I used to visit a friend of my father’s, the old Chief Druid Ross Nichols at his home in London and he began training me. He would make tea for us and then would read to me from a set of teachings he had prepared, and I remember so clearly how it was the sections on trees or plants that really inspired me. He was a poet and was able to write in a lyrical way about Nature. The scholarly failings of Robert Graves’ *The White Goddess* had not yet been revealed and he had absorbed Graves’ work avidly, and had built upon that.

As the years rolled by, and I learnt more about the Druid tradition, I became disappointed that there was so little plant lore - as opposed to tree lore - within the tradition. One day I was writing about one of the four Druid plants that Pliny had identified - Vervain - for the revised version of the Order’s Ovate teachings when it suddenly struck me that perhaps, as with the traditional animal lore that Stephanie and I had researched 13 years ago for *The Druid Animal Oracle*, the plant lore of the ancient Druids was not lost but simply had to be looked for in a different way.

We began researching traditional plant lore - and to our delight we started to feel that we were beginning to piece together much of the old herb-lore that would have been used in those far-off times. We did this by drawing on information from five sources: archaeobotany; the information given in the old herbals that were written at the time of the ancient Druids; accounts of the practices of later herbalists; the clues left to us in the old Irish and Welsh legends and in folklore; and the findings of botanical pharmacology.

In other words, if we found that a plant had been growing in the territory of the ancient Druids, and if its healing powers had been discussed in one of the old herbals that were written by their contemporaries (such as Dioscorides) we deduced that it was highly likely that the Druids would have used it. If, in addition, the plant was mentioned in one of the old legends and if it appeared in folklore then it was clearly entrenched in tradition and was even more likely to have been used by the ancient Druids. The other sources of information were sometimes able to help us with supporting evidence.

By researching in this way we identified over forty plants that we reckon were almost certainly used in those far-off times, and we have used these plants to form *The Druid Plant Oracle*. But the oracular usage of plants was only one of thirteen magical uses that we have identified, and which can initially be explored by Druids over the course of the thirteen moons of a year, although – naturally – at a deeper level this is the work of a lifetime.

The Curriculum of 13 Moons

In *The Druid Plant Oracle* we have focused on just one of these thirteen ways to create a tool for the use of plant lore in a particular way, but we have also tried to touch upon the other twelve uses of plants in ancient or contemporary Druidism, which I will summarise here, with just a few examples for each use:



1. The use of plants as food: food as sacred and life-sustaining – as a conveyor of the life-force. Wheat has been used in a sacred way in a number of traditions: in the Eleusinian Mysteries, in Christianity, and in Druid and Pagan traditions at the harvest time of Lughnasadh. The Bean is another food with deep symbolic associations, this time to the Ancestors and the Otherworld. A study of the mythology attached to the pig in Celtic tradition, alongside a study of the Bean will reveal many similarities.

2. The use of plants in drinks, elixirs and tonics: just as ingesting plants as food in a ceremony can become a central feature, so can the ingesting of a sacred drink. In Druid rituals this is usually mead, often produced by bees feeding on Heather – a plant filled with associations to joy and community. But a variety of herbal elixirs, such as those made from Burdock and Dandelion, or Birch sap, enable the modern Druid to enhance their health and feel connected with the past while also honouring the stereotype perpetuated by the Asterix cartoons, of the magical elixir-quaffing sage.

3. The use of plants as clothing: modern Druids know how the use of clothes, and sometimes no clothes, can enhance the experience of ritual. Linen made from Flax was the main component of clothing for thousands of years – as it was of sail-cloth. As a result, the tiny seeds of Flax have helped us to build our civilisation, while plants like Woad and Weld were used by our ancestors to dye their cloth, and can be used by us to fashion our ritual clothing.

4. The use of plants for journeying in consciousness: the use of plants psychotropically to alter consciousness is well documented in many ancient and contemporary indigenous traditions. There is no evidence, however, of its use within ancient Celtic cultures or within Druidry, despite the prevalence of the Psilocybin mushroom commonly known as the Liberty Cap, and of Fly Agaric. There are some, though, who suggest that certain herbs, such as Mugwort, were smoked to stimulate psychic powers. Traces of Mugwort have been found on the drinking cup of the recently unearthed 'Druid' of the first century near Colchester, and it seems sensible that for health reasons the modern Druid should follow this example, drinking rather smoking *Artemisia Vulgaris*.

5. The medicinal use of plants: the history of herbalism is undoubtedly as old as the history of humanity. The classical writers only recorded the Druids' use of four plants for magical and medicinal purposes: Mistletoe, Vervain, Selago – probably Fir Club Moss – and Samolus, possibly Water Pimpernel. But our research has allowed us to build a pretty good idea of the medicinal plants the ancient Druids would have used, such as Valerian – which is prized for its calming effect.

6. The use of plants for anointing: as an example, oils of primrose and vervain, mentioned in some of the old texts as being ingredients of Ceridwen's brew, can be used to bless a Bard.

7. The use of plants in ritual: flowers are often used in Druid ceremonies and garlic is often used in the ritual of Samhain. Cloves are sprinkled across the threshold before inviting Spirits of the Departed into a house to partake of a ritual feast. Flower petals might be used to cast a circle at a festivity such as Beltane.

8. The use of plants in incense: in Druidry incense is often used to cleanse and perfume a working space or the aura. Agrimony and juniper berries are good for this purpose.



9. The use of plants in lustrations: ritual washing or laving, of the hands, face, body, altar, circle or tools can be enhanced with the addition of plants to the water being used. Again a good plant for this is Agrimony, known as Mur-druidhean, literally 'the sorrow of the Druids' but really meaning 'the dispeller of sorrow used by the Druids'.

10. The use of plants in spells: Druids are cautious of spells, knowing the wisdom in the saying, 'When the gods want to punish us, they answer our prayers.' The ancient Druids did use spells, and contemporary Druids might sometimes too, having carefully considered the ethical and magical implications. In the old days, fern was used in spells for invisibility. A Druid today might still use fern if they were wishing to pass unnoticed through a hostile crowd for example.

11. The use of plants in charms and talismans: followers of the Old Ways are familiar with the idea of energy and vibrations. A plant will emanate a certain vibration, and if we carry some of this plant with us, perhaps as a piece of dried root in a pouch around our neck

or in our pocket, it will exert a continuous influence on our aura – broadcasting its unique vibration into our energy field. Betony, one of those plants which has so many beneficial properties it became known as a ‘Cure-All’, was traditionally used in this way, as was Mandrake - a plant so renowned in ancient times it was almost certainly imported into Druid lands even in those earliest of days.

12. The use of plants as offerings: giving gifts seems innate to humankind. Part of being alive involves wanting to give – if only of our DNA to further the species, and so offering plants to a deity on an altar, or to a couple on marrying, or to a grave at a funeral seems the most natural thing in the world, and archaeology shows that our ancestors found Meadowsweet with its sweet almond-like scent an ideal plant of offering, as is Vervain – the Enchanter’s Plant, mentioned by Pliny as being one of the favoured plants of the Druids.

Finally we come to thirteenth use, which inspired us to create the oracle: the oracular use of plants. While parts of some plants, such as the stalks of Yarrow (in the Celtic lands and in China) have been used as tools of divination, and while other plants, with psychotropic ingredients, have been used in attempts to access oracular powers of consciousness, for today’s needs we have taken the traditional meanings associated with many of the plants that were likely to have been used by the ancient Druids, and translated them into contemporary terms – bearing in mind the sorts of issues we struggle with today.

It is heartening to feel that although much knowledge has undoubtedly been lost over time, we can still work with the same plants our ancestors thousands of years would have worked with. And as we throw meadowsweet blooms into a grave, or brew ourselves a cup of herb tea, we can remember them across the centuries and thank them for all they have given us.

Philip Carr-Gomm

THE PATH TO TRUTH

Where I a Christian, I would be admired for my brotherly love, my charity to others, my sense of forgiveness.
Where I a follower of Islam, I would be admired for my faith, my commitment to the family and community.
Where I a Buddhist, I would be admired for my discipline, my search for enlightenment.
Where I a Hindu, I would be admired for my piety.
Where I Jewish, I would be admired for my strength in the face of persecution and suffering.
Where I a Pagan?

Would I be admired for my brotherly love, my charity to others, my sense of forgiveness?
Would I be admired for my faith, my commitment to family and community?
Would I be admired for my discipline, my search for enlightenment?
Would I be admired for my piety?
Would I be admired for my strength in the face of persecution and suffering?
Or would I be ridiculed and scorned? Or ignored?
Would I be falsely accused? Fear losing my children?
Would I have the freedom to follow my own pathway in my own country?

A pathway is one spoke on a cosmic wheel.
In travelling that path we try to reach the hub.
No matter which spoke we travel on we are all aiming for that one central point.
The paths to Truth are as many as the breaths of Man.

© Mhaille



WHITEOAK (Ord na Darach Gile) Lughnasad Druid Conclave East August 15 -17, 2008

MEMBERS OF ALL ESTABLISHED DRUID ORDERS ARE INVITED TO JOIN US!

A primitive camping event (bring your solar shower, water, tent, potluck food, cooler, bug stuff, etc.) In Western MA. There is a grill for cooking. **NO DOGS ALLOWED.**

Musical instruments, poetic offerings encouraged. There will be a poetry and a craft competition!

A gathering for members of all Druid Orders and their friends. Formerly known as the "Druid Summit", it is a place in the forest where Druids from all paths come together to share and discuss issues of common relevance.

This year we will feature a bardic competition and a craft competition as well as a ritual in the forest. It is a primitive camping event on the weekend of August 15 - 17, 2008 in the hills of Western Massachusetts.

The food and drink are potluck, bring your own solar shower (and extra wood and water), dried or fresh herbs and flowers (to offer to trees), silver coins (dimes and quarters)(to offer to water) and butter or oil (to offer to fire).

Plan to arrive Friday after 5 PM. Saturday we will do ceremony and Sunday morning we will have a blueberry pancake feast. We ask that you bring the bounty of the season to share with everyone (including pancake mix, blueberries, eggs, milk, bacon, etc. Please bring organic ingredients). Applicants will also be asked for a small donation to cover the rental of sanitary facilities. ***Please note*** this is not a "Pagan" gathering or a gathering for the general public. It is for Druids and close friends and family only.

FOOD

Each meal is "family style", that is, we all eat together at each meal. Plan to bring enough to feed yourself and several more at each meal (even if you are vegan, for example, you can bring extra veggies!). Some folks are volunteering to bring "extras".

To sign up please email membership@whiteoakdruids.org

At Tara

Ancient kings
beneath the sod of Tara lie,
the emerald turf itself
beneath a curving azure sky.
The sacred mould
a treasure holds,
of Eire's golden past,
for heroes sleep beneath the sweep
of Tara's grass.
And were it only ancient wars
that scarred this gentle plain,
and peaceful rest
for Tara's blest assured,
then all the ancient sorrows
of the nation's strife
were well endured.
O let them lie beneath the sky
and let the grass grow free,
and never let the memory die,
lest Tara cease to be.

©W. William Melnyk (OakWyse)

Christians

The tonsured ones
in coarse robes
of brown
came first alone
and then with
men of the tuath.
They drove the wise ones
from the grove
and cut down the oaks.
They heaped the once
proud sentinels into
the circle of stones
and lit the fire.
They thought that
would bring us
to their god.
As if our gods
could be killed
by axe or fire.
We stood away
from the heat and flame,
stunned that this god
they offered us
needed man to
strike for him.

Merlinbeag ©2008

Peaches are for Health and Pleasure By Emily McAllister

Growing up in Georgia at the height of the state's peach production I have long and rich personal connection with the fruit. July was when the best of Georgia's peaches ripened the scent of the warm fruit filled the orchards. You could almost feel the peach fuzz just from breathing in the warm sweet fragrance. The Elberta Peach, a very sweet cling-stone variety which was one of the last to reach maturity. It was also our family favorite to cook with and to make ice cream.

Although I know at one time we had a hand crank churn but I don't remember it well. My grandmother used her 'green stamps' (a customer incentive from the local Piggly Wiggly grocery) to get the first electric churn in our rural area. Starting at the end of June we would make peach custard ice cream nearly every weekend. On some of those weekends the entire neighborhood would show up for a taste of the creamy treat. Often all of the kids would fight over who got to pour the rock salt over the ice while the churn spun and when it was cured we all wanted the chance to lick the dasher.

My great-grandmother made pickled peaches, but somehow I never learned to like them. But her peach preserves were delectable. My aunt always brought her 'quicky peach cobbler' to every family event, winter or summer. It was basically a 'dump' recipe, after she stirred together the other ingredients she would dump fresh or frozen sweetened peaches on top of the dough and as it baked the peaches would sink down into the middle. We thought that was Magick when we were children.

As a teenager, I spent many weeks during the summer working at a peach packing shed. The girl's jobs were sorting the peaches for sale at the shed and for shipping. The first group of girls standing at a station just as the peaches came from a deep well of vinegar and water would pull the rotten or bad fruit from the peaches rolling past on the conveyor. This is the job a first year employee would get. Later stations sorted peaches by ripeness.



The ripest fruits were sold at the shed to locals and the least ripe going to the shipping destinations most distant. While sorting peaches wasn't a difficult job, it was itchy and hot. As soon as we got home each day, my sister and I would fight for the first bath.

The boys at the packing shed had the hardest jobs. They had to put together the shipping boxes in the furnace like attic of the shed or stack the heavy boxes at the end of the sorting process on pallets and in trucks for shipment. All of shed crew got paid 'under the table' in cash. We worked hard to get and keep those packing shed jobs. They certainly paid a lot better than babysitting.

Peaches are still a vital part of farm life in Georgia, although now California and South Carolina outstrip us in production. They are also still a vital part of my life. I still look forward to sharing the first churn of peach ice cream with friends. Also, I have several Pickling peach trees on the small rural farm I live on now; they are an old variety with small less sweet fruit. It is the variety most people use to make pickles, but it isn't very sweet and not good to just pick and eat. Yet the deer do not agree with me on this point, and as the fruit ripens I spend many evenings sitting on my back porch watching them come and go beneath the peach trees.

While peaches have always played a vital role in my life, in fact peaches have been an important part of the nutritional and financial lives of humanity for a long time. Peaches have been grown for at least four thousand years. The fruit tree is native to China and spread into Europe via Persia and India. It was later introduced into Florida by the Spanish explorers. The Native Americans in Florida became very fond of the fruit and spread it up into the south eastern area of the country by carrying seeds with them on trading trips. This eventually led to other tribes spreading peaches further north and west by the same means.

While Thomas Jefferson had peaches at his Monticello estate and peaches were cultivated as a crop in India, Italy, China and Spain actual farm production in the United States did not become popular until the nineteenth century.

In China the peach has a folklore as rich as the fruit itself. It was said to be eaten by immortals and the peaches themselves were responsible for the longevity of those beings. The Jade Emperor, Yu Huang, and his mother, Xi Wangmu fed peaches to their household gods to ensure their continued existence. They had lavish banquets for the immortals of the royal palace called 'feasts of peaches' or Pantao Hui. Even to this day in China, the peach is a symbol of longevity.

The peach is also used in the far eastern regions as a symbol for the vagina. The fruit is used to portray this portion of the female anatomy where actual depiction would be considered vulgar. Often the slang word 'peach' in those regions refers to a young bride.

Magickally peaches are associated with fertility, good wishes, longevity, protection and wisdom. The flowers, fruit and juice can be used for love spells and when a couple is seeking children in fertility spells. It can also be used as an emblem of marriage, in shrines or spells of unmarried women seeking marriage or to symbolize a young bride. The fruit can be offered as a token of longevity, wisdom or protection on the Magickal altar. The peaches element is water. It is neither Yin nor Yang but instead considered a neutral and in Chinese medicine a moderate 'warm' remedy. The deities associated with it are the Chinese Goddess, Hai Wang Ma and the Shinto God, Iznagi.

Historically, peach leaves and bark were used to treat the illnesses quinine is now used to treat. This includes malaria, arthritis and leg cramps. Also the powdered leaves and bark were used to pack sores and wounds.

Today peaches are considered valuable for many medicinal reasons. First the fruit is high in antioxidants and are valuable in keeping the entire body healthy. Because of the elimination of toxins, it makes an excellent addition to weight control diets.

In the digestive system dried peaches can be used in the treatment of ulcers in the stomach, inflammation of the bowel and colitis. When used for these reasons the peaches should be soaked, cooked and pureed before taking. The ease at which they are digested makes this treatment especially good for elderly people as well as a good addition to their diets. Also because of its high water content the fresh peaches have laxative properties and stimulate digestive juices.

In the circulatory system peaches are excellent at alkalizing the blood stream. Also of use in the pulmonary system, the leaves can be made into a tea which has expectorant properties which can ease chest congestion. Because of this it has been used to treat breathing problems from the common cold to bronchitis.

In the urinary system the peach leaf tea is valuable for cleansing the kidneys and stimulating urine production. Because of the high sulfur content in commercially dried peaches it is best to choose an organic variety of the dried fruit or purchase peaches in season and dry them yourself. When eating canned peaches, it is best to discard the high sugar syrup and eat only the peach. Although I found several websites which tout the cancer curative properties of the stone it is best to avoid this as the seeds contain a poison organic chemical, cyanogens. Ingesting the seed has been linked to many deaths.

Peaches dry and freeze well, so are available for cooking throughout the year. To dry the fruit slice fairly thin, sprinkle with Fruit Fresh to prevent browning and follow the directions on your dehydrator or in a convection oven until thoroughly dry at 120 degrees. Freeze fresh or frozen adding sugar or artificial sweeteners if desired and Fruit Fresh to prevent browning. The fruit makes an excellent addition to cold and cooked cereals and in cooking just as delicious a choice for pies, cobblers, preserves, muffins, ice cream and cakes.

Peaches contain the minerals Calcium, Phosphorus, Iron, and Potassium and the vitamins A, B1, B2, Thiamine and Niacin. Peaches are also a good source of antioxidants. The yellow flesh cling-stone varieties have a higher content of vitamin A than the white flesh free-stone varieties.

The following recipe is the family recipe which was handed down from my great-grandmother. For the best results make sure the peaches you choose are extremely ripe. You might want to invite guests when making this recipe as it produces a full size one gallon churn of ice cream. Serve the ice cream with the hot peach cobbler for a special treat. It would be a great way to start your own peach traditions.

Peach Custard Ice Cream

3 eggs
2 cups sugar
1 tablespoon vanilla
½ teaspoon almond flavoring
1 pint whipping cream
1 quart half and half
1 quart milk - divided
3 cups very ripe mashed or pureed peaches

In a medium bowl beat eggs until thick and lemon colored. Gradually beat in sugar. Pour egg mixture into a medium saucepan and combine with two cups of milk. Cook and stir over low heat until the mixture thickens enough to coat the back of the spoon. Remove from heat and add vanilla and almond flavorings. Cool to room temperature. After mixture cools pour into a tank of a large ice cream churn and add remaining ingredients except milk stirring well after each addition.

Fill the tank to the fill line (should be marked on the inside of the tank) with milk; this may not take the entire quart. Stir well. Place dasher into tank and seal. Freeze by manufacturer directions and don't forget to pour rock salt over the ice as this helps with freezing time. When ice cream is ready the freezer will normally stop or turn exceeding slowly.

Turn off and cover the entire churn with a towel for ten to fifteen minutes to allow curing before serving. Store left over amounts in a plastic container with a tightly fitting lid and place in the freezer. When serving from the freezer allow the ice cream to sit in the refrigerator to soften slightly before serving.



Quick & Magickal Peach Cobbler

1 cup milk
1 cup self rising flour
1 cup sugar
½ cup butter or margarine (one stick)
1 egg slightly beaten
3 to 4 cups sliced fresh peaches which have been sweetened to taste

Mix together first five ingredients and beat until well blended. Pour into an oven proof casserole dish. Pour sweetened peaches into the middle of the dough. Do not stir or push down into dough. Bake at 350 degrees for 30 minutes or until golden brown. Serve hot.

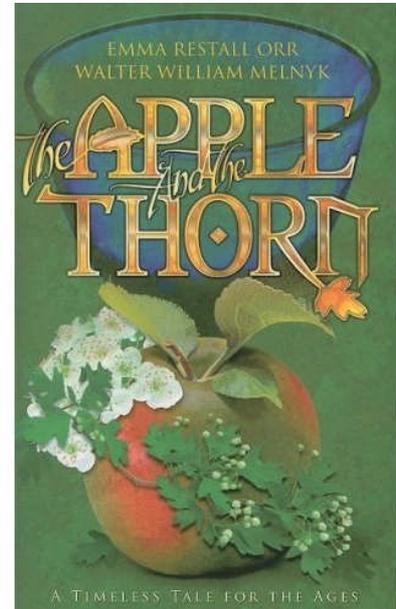
The Apple and the Thorn

By Emma Restall Orr and Walter William Melnyk
Thoth Publications, Liechestershire, 2007
ISBN 978-1-870450-68-3

Reviewed by Saille (Ellen Evert Hopman)

In reading this book the first thing that struck me was that there seems to be a new genre of Pagan historical fiction emerging; written by Pagans attempting to come to terms with Christianity and the way it first converted the indigenous peoples of ancient Europe. I include my own novel "Priestess of the Forest: A Druid Journey" in this category.

The Apple and the Thorn is not an easy book to read, for several reasons. If you are a Druid you will likely find it somewhat off-putting. The authors seem to have a strong bias against Druids, odd because Orr is (or was) a co-chief of the British Druid Order. As a Druid Priestess reading the work I had to constantly write that bias off to nasty experiences one or both of the authors may have had with modern Druids.



The Druids in the book are all male. The male protagonist Eosaidh (Joseph of Arimethea) wonders why the female protagonist, Vivian (the High Priestess of Affalon), doesn't just forbid the Druids from coming to the Tor. Vivian says that once, long ago, "the Druids did seek the mysteries...then they began to seek knowledge...and now they seek power". She dislikes and distrusts those (like Druids) who work in the light, preferring the dark of the soil and the dark fire within the land. She even dislikes the herb Saint Johnswort because it arrogantly shines in the darkness (Druids, like the herb, are arrogant in her mind). She goes on to say that seeking light and knowledge leads to amassing power and then becoming violent and "I wonder yet again how many Druids now have broken their bond, that the Gods are now forsaking their people". (She conveniently ignores the fact that the Gods forsook Affalon too, despite the presence of the Lady of the Lake and her Priestesses). Reference is made to the "Druidic delusion" and Vivian opines that "The Druids words show his ignorance, his lack of competence"

The book is pretty tough on Druids. I wonder why the authors overlook the incredible contribution of the Druids to the tribes. Druids kept the laws in their heads to ensure the king's justice and prevent mayhem, mastered and passed down to the generations intricate poetic, medical, diplomatic, and legal arts, and mastered the arts of prophecy. They were students and teachers of natural science and philosophy. None of this is alluded to in the book.

Later in the story Christians and Romans appear on the scene and they too are portrayed as arrogant.

The chapters are written alternately in the voice of Vivian and then the voice of Eosaidh. Eosaidh is the uncle of "the lad" Jesus and so the chapters are a kind of conversation between Pagan and Jew. The two main characters are creaky and old, filled with sighs, tears, and the pains of old age. Their bones ache and they lean on their staffs to rise as they stumble exhaustedly through the story.

The language of the book is satisfying, rich and thick with nature imagery. There is a dark poetic resonance to the words. The description of the most holy shrine of the Lady Vivian is poetic and I can see others erecting similar shrines in their gardens (I won't spoil the

surprise by revealing what it is here). For me the nature imagery was the most pleasing aspect of the work, Emma Restall Orr seems to have a particular talent for that kind of prose.

But the book offers little in the way of hope for the future. Christianity is seen as a fanatical distortion of the teachings of Jesus. The Romans have overrun the landscape and both protagonists wheeze into lingering sickness and death.

As a Druid Priestess and as a human being living in trying yet interesting times, I hope for books and teachings that make life's burdens a little easier. I hoped to find something like that in this work, but sadly I didn't.

Celtic Spirit Fire

By Michael J. McCoy, Wordclay, Bloomington, IN., 2008
ISBN 978-1-6048-1115-5

Reviewed by Saille (Ellen Evert Hopman)

I've recently had the pleasure of discovering this book, yet another in the genre of "Pagan attempting to reconcile with Christianity" that seems to be the going theme this summer. The author, a former Christian clergyman, is an Irish-American struggling to recover from his Irish Catholic upbringing while embracing Celtic Reconstructionist spirituality.

The work begins with the best "Celtic" creation myth I have ever read. As most Druids know we have no Celtic creation myth left to us from ancient times, other than the account of The Cailleach dropping the Western Isles from "under her apron" (from her vagina) yet somehow McCoy manages to craft a plausible creation story that is redolent with poetic Truth.

Next follows a wisdom tale that features talking salmon and the initiation quest of a warrior, also well written and filled with inspiring imagery and spirit. Then we are given an account of the author's apprenticeship as a glass artist, filled with observations about the place and power of Celtic philosophy and Celtic symbols in works of art. Finally there are original prayers for healing, for the blessing of meals, for warriors, for safe journey, for Celtic baptism, for the hearth, for various life passages, and for the festival of Samhain (oddly none of the other Fire Festivals are covered in the work).

It is a very Irish book, written in English but using Irish vernacular phrases and filled with pints, fish and chips, rashers, bangers, scones and tea, and plenty of traditional music and "craic". It tackles issues that modern Catholics are struggling with such as clergy sex abuse and oppressive church dogma, guilt and Hell fire, but throughout it is also filled with hope; pointing the way towards a future where Celtic spirituality may once again be honored as a respected world religion.

I am pleased that most of the Celtic books the author references are in the Whiteoak basic reading list or ones that are otherwise well known to me. The spirituality of the author has a very familiar feel. The only downside that I found was the cover design. The poetry of the images and philosophy within its pages deserve a more sedate and dignified cover, but perhaps the author intended the garish red cover and purple prose to convey something of the Celtic warrior spirit.

It would be a wonderful book for any Celtic Reconstructionist to curl up with on a lazy summer afternoon. Highly recommended.

