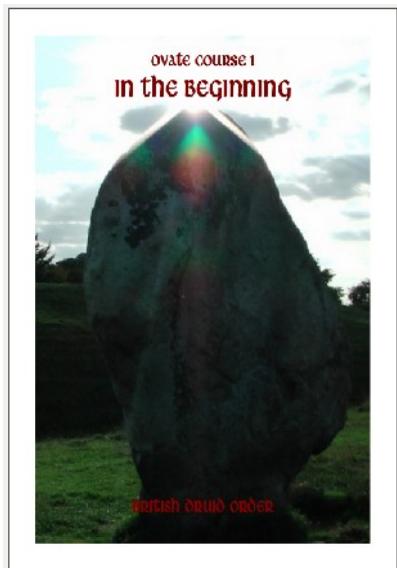


BDO OVATE COURSE SAMPLER



Remember that lovely sample file you looked at before signing up for our bardic course? Well, this is another one, only for the ovate course. How cool is that? And yes, before you ask, I'm afraid it is necessary to take our bardic course before signing up for the ovate, since each course builds on the preceding one and refers back to it.

The following selections are chosen to give a flavour of the course's style, representing a range of voices and types of illustration, intended to help you decide whether the course is for you before signing up. They are, however, just a few brief extracts from a course that runs to 24 booklets (plus a card set), about 1200 pages and over 400,000 words. This really is just a small taster.

One advantage of the courses being in pdf format is that they include interactive contents pages like the one below. Click on an item and you'll be taken to that item in the text. Click on the heading there and it'll bring you back to the Contents page. Neat, huh?

contents:

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The course follows the Wheel of the Year and the cycles of life, hence we open our selections with the following edited extract from booklet 1, In The Beginning:

ON BEING BORN

“When I was born, I had no head and my eye was single and my body was filled with light, and the light that I was was the light that I saw by, and the light that I saw by was the light that I was.”

From 'Douglas Traherne Harding' by Mike Heron from the Incredible String Band LP, *Wee Tam & the Big Hugs* (1968)

The moment of birth is the archetypal rite of passage by which we pass from one state of being to another, from the encased, comforting, twilight warmth of the womb where we rest to the rhythmic sound of our mother's heartbeat and where all our needs are provided umbilically, to a world where our primal attachment to our mother is severed and we become an individual presence in a bright world full of new and often disconcerting sensations. All later rites of passage seek in some way to emulate this first one.

For parents, birth is a powerful focus of hope and fear, pain and joy, physicality and spirituality. No wonder it is celebrated in cultures all around the world with varying degrees of ritual, by parents, their families and wider communities. In 19th century Scotland, as recorded in Alexander Carmichael's *Carmina Gadelica*, it was traditional to sing a blessing for the newborn babe as it was being bathed for the first time. One example, with slight variations from the original, goes as follows:



*By the power of the perfect three,
A little drop of the sun
On thy little forehead, beloved one.
A little drop of the moon
On thy little forehead, beloved one.
A little drop of the earth
On thy little forehead, beloved one,
To aid thee, to guard thee,
To shield and surround thee,
To keep thee from the fays
And shield thee from the host,
To sain thee from the gnomes,
To deliver thee from spectres.
A little drop of the three
To shield thee from all sorrow.
A little drop of the three
To fill thee with their kindness.
A little drop of the three
To fill thee with their virtues.*

The following selection from booklet 2 introduces a series of pieces on the phases of the moon that run throughout the course, written for us by Elen Hawke, author of In the Circle: Crafting the Witches' Path (Llewellyn, 2001), The Sacred Round: A Witch's Guide to Magical Practice (Llewellyn, 2002), Praise to the Moon: Magic & Myth of the Lunar Cycle (Llewellyn, 2002), An Alphabet of Spells (Llewellyn, 2003), and the recent Kindle book, The Sacred Marriage (2012).

the lunar cycle

Just as we work with the eight seasonal festivals of the Wheel of the Year, so we can also work with the monthly waxing and waning of the moon, aligning ourselves with the ebb and flow of its tides, thus deepening our understanding of both the cosmic pattern of emptiness, growth, fullness and rest and our own responses to the energies we encounter as the moon moves through the seasons and the Zodiac signs. Whether those energies are used for magic, healing and spiritual work, or to come to a greater understanding of our own psyches and our relationship with nature, working with the lunar cycle can be rewarding and enlightening. In fact it's useful to follow a creative thread through every part of the moon's monthly journey, from thought and concept at new moon to germinating seed at first crescent, to thrusting shoots as the moon waxes, right on till full moon flowering, then ageing and letting go as the moon wanes, then rebirth as new moon arrives once more.

Patterns of fertility also are tied to the moon's phases for us and other creatures. It's not uncommon for menstruation in humans to occur at dark moon (either the last day or so of its waning or the actual new moon day) and for ovulation to happen around full moon: though in modern cities, where it's hard to block out the perpetual light, some women find their menstrual cycle has been thrown out of synch with the moon. But fertility doesn't just concern procreation but also creative "children", the



products of our imaginations, our minds, our hands.

Poets, musicians, artists and other creative people can often attest to the influence the moon has on their conceptualisation and output. Things begun on a new or waxing moon often flourish better than those begun after the full moon. This knowledge has been used by farmers and gardeners in the past so that bulbs and root crops, which need to spend much of their life cycle underground, are best planted when the moon is waning, and crops that are harvested above the soil should be planted from new to full moon. A tree planted when the moon is old will often do less well than one planted on the waxing cycle. In India, where people have always planned their lives around astrological timing, one would not marry or begin a business or any other venture on a waning moon.

Different times in the lunar cycle are appropriate for different states of mind or activities. Scrying or other forms of divination are effective at waning or dark moon, as is meditation. Physical activity is appropriate to waxing and full moon phases, while rest and contemplation are easier when the lunar tides are ebbing and the life force is drained and weaker.

One way to experience the effect of the moon's mutable energies on time and place would be to visit a sacred site at each significant part of the moon's cycle and observe how the waxing or waning power of the moon affects the existing energy at that place. For example, the Dragon Project, a research project at the Rollright Stones near Chipping Norton, England, is said to have found that the power of the stones fluctuated according to the phases of the moon. Pay attention to the season and whether or not one of the eight festivals is imminent or happening. So many factors affect us and no pattern ever repeats itself exactly. Life is constantly evolving and changing, even as it follows regular sequences and paths.

In many cultures the moon is feminine, but in others it is seen as masculine. Much of this perception is down to geographical location and cultural bias. In the far north of Europe, for example, the moon is thought to be cold, barren, harsh and masculine, while the sun, which nurtures the crops and brings warmth and life, is thought to be feminine. In hot, arid regions, where the sun burns and destroys and the moon brings night-time coolness, these roles might be reversed. In Hindu culture, the moon is a charming and beautiful man who visits a different female consort every few days as he moves through the zodiac. In Japan, the sun was seen as a goddess.

In Britain (or for those in other countries who are intent on following a Celtic path) we tend to see the moon as feminine and she can be associated with Celtic goddesses such as Ceridwen with her cauldron and Arianrhod with her silver wheel. To me, Ceridwen has a dark side that would fit the full to waning moon part of the lunar round, while Arianrhod might hold sway over the entire cycle, with her turning wheel, or maybe the roundness of the wheel would indicate the full moon. Similarly the Irish Morrigan might belong to dark waning moon, with her associations with death and destruction. Elen of the trackways, Blodeuwedd the Flower Maiden and Branwen, as young goddesses, might be placed between new moon and first quarter. In some ways deity associations are a personal choice and some speculation,

visualisation or meditation could help you decide what works for you.

Elen also provides rituals and meditations to accompany each of the moon's major phases. Next we have the first letter of the Ogham alphabet as described by Blue Fox to accompany our new Ogham card deck designed by Greywolf:

the ogham letters

┆ Beith - BIRCH

Letter, 'B' **Tree, Birch** **Ogham name, Beith**

Phrase Oghams: *faded trunk and fair hair, most silvery of skin*

There are two species of birch native to the British Isle, the Silver and the Downy, with frequent crossing between the two producing many hybrids exhibiting the characteristics of both. For the purpose of this booklet we will focus on the most well known and easily identifiable of the two - the Silver birch.

The birch, along with the willow, hazel and rowan are the 'pioneer' species, which quickly colonise bare ground. Being able to root in poor soils, the birch's thin leaves quickly degrade when shed and enrich the soil of the areas it colonises. This enables the more demanding species such as oak and beech to grow under it and provide food and shelter for a variety of animals, birds, insects, plants and fungi. Its light, air-borne seeds are able to travel considerable distances before settling and germinating.

A walk in a birch wood is always an edifying experience, with the birches straight and slender, silvery-white trunks, and graceful limbs and leaves fluttering in even the slightest of breezes. Its light and airy canopy allows sunlight to stream through, and it is easy to see why pagan Celtic and Germanic tribes revered this tree, seeing it as holy, with sacred powers of renewal and purification. Birch rods were used for driving out evil spirits and 'beating the bounds'. Birch twigs can be cut in winter to make besom brooms and the traditional witch's broomstick, and tool handles can also be fashioned from birch wood. Birch sap can be made into a sweet and uplifting wine.

Beith, the 'pioneer', is the first letter of the Beith-Luis-Nion alphabet and the Ogham meaning, like the quality of the tree itself, stands for renewal, purification, new beginnings and fresh starts. The 'lady of the woods' as the birch is sometimes referred to as, also stands for grace, beauty and fresh hope. Beith also has many associations of love and fertility too. On receiving this Ogham in a reading, new ventures are particularly well favoured.

Key word or phrase: New beginnings.

B - Beith - BIRCH

faded trunk & fair hair



most silvery of skin

new BEGINNINGS

Our next two selections are from booklet 9, The Healing Arts, the first being by Greywolf, the second by an anonymous Irish mystic:

the place of healing

We each have our own place of healing, existing either in this world or the Otherworld or, of course, in both. Wherever located, it offers perfect peace and security and a deep spiritual centre from which the process of healing can begin. Just as our ancestors sought spiritual guidance through dreams experienced at shrines like that at Lydney, so visiting our place of healing can bring specific guidance on how treatment should proceed. Once there, we may be shown what we need to restore spirit, mind and body to health and well-being.

The place of healing can be found through meditation, divination, or with the help of a spirit guide or of someone experienced in guiding spirit journeys. It can emerge from a dream or may be found during waking life. For some it may be the white sand of a tropical beach, for others the secure darkness of a deep cave, a sunlit forest glade, a rock shelf behind a waterfall, a hollow on a mountainside, a mossy tree beside a woodland stream, the heat of a desert or an Arctic ice-flow. It may be a place you knew in childhood, an ancient sacred site, or some enchanted place that you may never have seen in this world. It may be a natural spring like the well of Dian Cécht, or an ancient place of healing like the temple complexes at Lydney or Bath.

Ask your guides to help you find your place of healing. We cannot take you there through the pages of this booklet. It is too intimate, too personal to you. It is your place. We can, however, suggest ways in which those who walk with you in spirit, whether in this world or the worlds beyond, may help you to find it. Then, when you are troubled in spirit, mind or body, you may go there. In the peace that you find there, you may be given what you need to restore you to health.

Subsequent experience has shown that, as said at the beginning of this piece, we all have such a place. May your journey to find your own be blessed with success.



In the course, we follow this with a simple technique that may help you begin your journey to find your place of healing. Since this needs to be done within the context of the rest of the course, we have not given it here.

We return now to the traditions of medieval Ireland, and to a beautiful invocation translated from a probably 8th century original as recorded in the Book of Ballymote, compiled in County Sligo, circa 1390.

a PRAYER FOR LONG LIFE & a GOOD OLD AGE

May the cry of a worthy man upon the road bless me on my journey into the Plain of Age.

*I invoke the seven daughters of the Sea
who weave the threads of children for long life:
May three deaths be taken from me!
May three life-spans be granted to me!
May seven waves of good fortune be dealt to me!
Phantoms shall not harm me on my journey
a flashing breastplate keep me from injury!
My fame shall not be bound by death!
Let death not come to me till I am old!*

*I invoke my silver champion who has not died, who will not die:
May time be granted to me of the quality of pure bronze!
May my form be ennobled!
May my right be maintained!
May my strength be increased!
May my grave not be readied!
May death not come to me on my journey!
May my journey be successfully fulfilled!
May the two-headed adder not seize upon me,
nor the hard-grey serpent, nor the headless black beetle!
May no thief ever harm me, nor band of women, nor band of armed men.
May increase of time come to me from the King of All Being!*

*I invoke Senach ['the Ancient One'] of the seven ages,
whom fairy women have reared on breasts of plenty:
May my seven lights not be extinguished!
I am an indestructible stronghold,
I am an unshakeable rock,
I am a precious stone,
I am a fortunate one of seven riches.
May I live a hundred times a hundred years,
each hundred after another!
Thus I summon my good fortune to me.*

The spirits called upon during this invocation are all appropriate ones from whom to request good fortune, protection, good health and longevity. The “daughters of the Sea who weave the threads of children for long life” are clearly reminiscent of the groups of three goddesses we met in booklet 5, *The Path of the Seer* (pages 14-18), who weave the fates of infants shortly after their birth. In this case, however, there are seven and they are daughters of the Sea, i.e. of the sea god, Lir. The “silver champion” of the second verse is presumably Nuada Airgetlam ('of the silver hand'), warrior king of the Tuatha de Danaan. The references to the “adder,” “serpent” and “headless black beetle” are undoubtedly personifications of disease like the serpents we encountered on pages 11-13 above. Senach, 'the Ancient One,' may well be Fintan mac Bochra, the great and long-lived sage who arrived in Ireland with the first humans and remained through all its subsequent history (see booklet 7, *Natural Philosophy & An Ovate Miscellany*, pages 17-19).

Our next selection is from booklet 10, The Twelve Doorways of the Soul, and introduces our rediscovery of an ancient technique of healing.

the twelve doorways of the soul

A legal tract in the National Library of Ireland (MS. Phillips G11, *Bretha Déin Cécht*, 'The Judgements of Dian Cécht,' translated by D. A. Binchy in *Eriu*. Vol. XX, Royal Irish Academy, Dublin, 1966) offers a tantalising glimpse of a possible healing technique attributed to the healer god, Dian Cécht. The manuscript in which it appears dates from the 15th century, but the tract itself seems to be much older, perhaps 8th century. As well as listing payments based on social class for various medical procedures, there is a reference to “The Twelve Doors of the Soul” alternatively translated as “The Twelve Portals of Life:” Here's the full translation of that section:

“There are twelve doors of the soul in the human body: (1) the top of the head, i.e. the crown or the suture, (2) the hollow of the occiput (the back of the skull, Ed.), (3) the hollow of the temple, (4) the apple of the throat, (5) the spoon of the breast, (6) the armpit, (7) the breast-bone, (8) the navel area at the front of the body, (9) the bend of the elbow, (10) the hollow of the ham, i.e. from behind, (11) the bulge of the groin, i.e. the bull sinew, (12) the sole of the foot.”

The manuscript gives no further information on the significance of the twelve doors. Given the association of Dian Cécht with healing wounds taken in battle, they could simply be parts of the body regarded as especially vulnerable to wounding. However, the name, “doors of the soul,” (*dorus anma*) suggests that they have a more spiritual significance. In seeking to, as it were, unlock the doors, we have brought together information from various sources, British and Irish as well as other, related Indo-European medico-spiritual systems. The results are outlined below. Working with the twelve doorways in practice, based on this research, we have found a number of therapeutic techniques and these are also outlined below. This work has led us to

use the word 'doorways' rather than 'doors' as our preferred translation of *dorus*, since *doorways* conveys more strongly the idea of doors as ways through which things may pass both in and out. The significance of this will become clear.

... and here is an edited version of our description of the first of the Doorways...

the twelve doorways

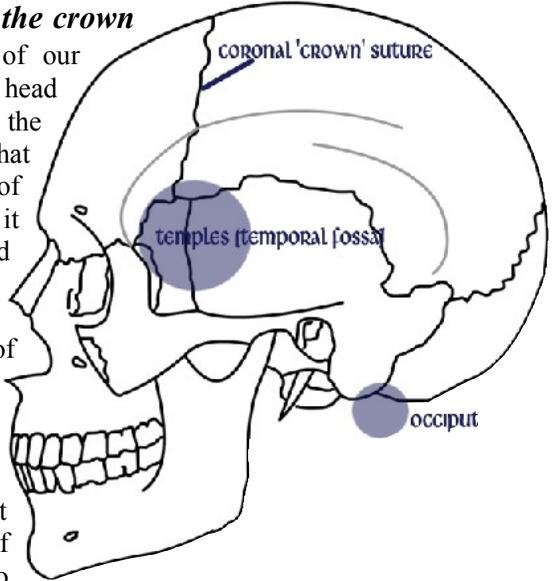
1) *The top of the head, i.e. the crown or the suture.*

The uppermost of our doorways, the crown of the head (coronal suture), is equivalent to the upper part of our third cauldron, that of wisdom. When the cauldron of wisdom is turned by divine joy, it gives the gifts of prophecy and performing miracles. Turned fully upright, this cauldron represents a merging together of the powers of light represented by the sun (cauldron of motion) and moon (cauldron of devotion) into the single light of unity.

The *Three Cauldrons* text describes one of the joys capable of turning the cauldron of motion into

that of wisdom as “joy at the onset of *imbas* (*awen*) by grinding away at the nuts of the nine hazels of fair fruitfulness that grow by the Well of Segais in the land of the *sidhe*. They hurtle upstream in a ram’s-head bore along the river Boyne, swifter than a three-year-old racehorse.” The awakening of Kundalini is described in similar terms as a powerful rush of energy surging through the *chakras* on its way to the crown. Given the appearance of ram-headed serpents in Celtic art, usually accompanying antlered gods seated cross-legged in a yogic pose, it's hard not to put these things together and conclude that there are remnants of a Kundalini-like system recorded in these images and in the medieval literature of Ireland. The reference to *imbas*, an Irish word closely equivalent in meaning to *awen*, is a reminder that the *anma* (*anadl*) of our twelve doorways text seems to be the primary means by which *awen* is moved around our body's internal energy systems.

My own experience of the opening of the crown doorway is of it being like the uppermost branches of a tree opening out into the sky above the head. The spinal column seems to be the trunk of the tree whose roots emerge from the base of the spine and root into the earth. In the Norse concept of the world tree (a concept we believe was shared by our Celtic ancestors), the upper branches of the tree are inhabited by a



great eagle, symbol of sovereignty and of the soaring spirit, the roots of the tree being encircled by a coiled dragon (see bardic booklet 14, *The Three Cauldrons*, pages 9-11). We have identified the crown doorway as the ruler of the blood humour and the element of air (*anadl*). Sure enough, opening this doorway seems to clear the sinuses and increase circulation and blood oxygen levels.

Hindu Chakra: This doorway relates to the *sahasrara chakra*, meaning 'thousand-petalled wheel.' It is portrayed as a thousand-petalled lotus representing the opening flower of universal consciousness. In Kundalini yoga, the crown *chakra* is the final destination of the awakened *Kundalini*, or serpent power, the arrival of which at this point marks the merging of all opposites in the blissful unity of oneness with the universe. Its harmonic note is B.

Ayurvedic Marma: The Adhipati ('lord of all') *marma*, the governing point of the whole body, ruling *prana* (our *anma*, *anadl*), health, energy and vitality. It relates to the pineal gland and spiritual transcendence. Working with it improves concentration, eyesight and the flow of information in the brain, can help calm and control the mind and emotions and open higher perceptive powers. It governs the *vayu dosha* or blood humour (*anadl*), relating to the elements of aether and air.

On the next page is a single entry from booklet 11, A Druid Herbal: Part One, compiled over 30 years of experience by Druid herbalist, Leon Reed. Leon has also provided a detailed look at astrology that forms much of the content of booklet 6, The Book of Stars, to which Elen Hawke has contributed additional material on sidereal and Vedic astrology with links to additional sources of practical information.

a DRUID HERBAL

Borage: (*Borago Officinalis*) Leaf and Flowers (right)

Contains: Mucilage, tannin, essential oil, potassium, calcium, pyrrolizidine alkaloids. Vitamin C, calcium, potassium. High levels of gamma linolenic acid in seeds.

Effect: Sweat inducing, used to treat flu, cold and nervous disorders. Promotes milk production.

Caution: Avoid excessive consumption.

Dosage and Administration: Tincture 10 ml. three times a day for stress.

500 mg. seed oil daily for irritable bowel syndrome, eczema, or rheumatoid arthritis.

1 tsp. per cup, steep 5 to 15 mins. for lungs.



Throughout the ovate course, we feature seasonal celebrations and rites of passage composed by Elaine Wildways, who draws on years of experience composing and conducting rites for the Shropshire-based Cornovii Grove. Our intention in providing these fully scripted rituals is not that they be slavishly adhered to but that they provide inspiration for you to create your own celebrations. Here's just the introduction and opening of our suggested ...

SPRING EQUINOX CEREMONY

Taking place (ideally) at the first full moon after the equinox. The date of Easter is still set as the first Sunday after the first full moon after the Spring equinox. This method of fixing the date of the Spring festival derives from ancient Babylon more than 2,500 years ago, when a 12-day festival of a dying and resurrected god of vegetation (Marduk or Tammuz) began on the first full moon after the equinox and marked the beginning of the year.

Roles:

Arianrhod

Gwydion

Moon Speaker (Can make up their own lines if they wish)

Hare (as above)

Lleu (as above for the 'I am' bit)

Chief

Storyteller

Quarters of North/South/East and West consecration of the circle from West and South

Peace Giver

Props:

Eggs/ little coloured chocolate ones that look like bird's eggs taste good and look wild. Participants to bring something with which to make a noise, like drums, old saucepans and wooden spoons etc. Music is always good, provided by harp, flute or guitar.

Preparation:

The Circle is set up outside if possible, the quarters marked with colours and flowers.

Everyone takes their places around the circle.

Chief makes a circuit on his/her own when everyone is in place and salutes the East as the point of the Rising Sun and the West as the Quarter of the Moon.

Chief: We are gathered here to honour and celebrate the Spring Equinox. This is the



time of balance as our Earth prepares to send forth that which it has nurtured in its deep, rich soil to be blessed by the solar, stellar and moonlit world above the ground. At the opposite time of the year the Earth prepares to take back the energies of the sun, Moon and stars, thus there is always a time of seed, of flower, of fruit and of returning. Positive and negative are equal in the natural world.

I call to the spirits of the ancient ones, whose wisdom drifts in the mists of morning and echoes in a distant breath, bring your helpful energy to this celebration here today. Spirit of this place we honour you and ask you to accept our presence here. Please bless our ceremony that we may work in harmony with this land. Helpful spirits both seen and unseen, join us and feel welcome!

Let all disturbing thoughts now be laid aside. Let us join hands and sing out 3 Awens as we set the tone for our ceremony to begin.

All Awen.

Peace Giver *steps forward*: May there be deep Peace at the centre of our circle and in our hearts, May there be Peace in the North, May there be Peace in the South, May there be Peace in the West, May there be Peace in the East. May there be Peace throughout the whole World!

Chief: I weave this circle, enclosing all within. I weave a perimeter of light representing the journey through the cycles of time, of the Sun, Moon and Stars. I cut the threads that link us to the world beyond. The circle is now cast.

Let us call to the quarters that the old ones know that their ways have not been forgotten beginning in the East.

Gate Keeper of the East: I call to the winds of March, you who herald the spring softness to come, who clear away the last of the old year that the new life can breakthrough and thrive. I honour the power of the wind. I ask you to bless our ceremony with a more gentle breeze. I call to the light of dawn and I see the daylight lengthening as the Mabon grows, bring the power of regeneration to this circle. I call to the Buzzard of this valley, that flies in the clear blue sky of early Spring to bring us the ability to see the way ahead of us. The Quarter of the East is open, Hail and welcome!

Gate Keeper of the South: I call upon the spirit of fire, of passion, of willpower. I call to those abilities that enable us to go forward and onward, knowing that sometimes this is the only way. I call to the Great Stag whose call echoes through the mountains of the Northern lands at the time of the rut. Come all and bring us the energy of the South. The Gateway of the South is open: Hail and welcome!

Gate Keeper of the West: I call upon the power that brings the high Equinox tides. I call to the Moon in it's.....(*whatever phase the moon is in at the time of the ceremony*). I call to the voices of the babbling brooks and the grander voices of rivers as they endlessly flow through the landscape into the great ocean. I call the energy of the Equinox as it flows through the natural world and sets in motion paths of instinct and wonder in the creatures of Earth. I call to the great Salmon of wisdom to be present

at this ceremony. The Gateway of the West is open. Hail and welcome!

Gate Keeper of the North: Deep and fruitful Earth I call upon the power of nurture, that power that makes all things grow. I call to the great Bear that once lived in the caves of this land, to be present and honoured. Without the Earth no human life would exist. There would be no green trees, no flowers, no form, no mountains, valleys, or fields, I call the treasure of appreciation and abundance to imbue this circle and to manifest in all our lives. The Gateway of the North is open. Hail and welcome!

Storyteller: In the days long gone the Ancestors created ways of understanding the world and it's cycles of birth, growth and death They enjoyed celebrations and merriment that eased times when it was cold, dark and wet. They told stories to explain the seasons and what must be done to appease the Gods and Goddesses, that the crops would grow and animals and humans flourish. The stories were told by many generations, in different parts of our land. On the lands in the sea, in the far North the stories will not be the same as inland in the South...

...Arianrhod the Lady of the Silver Wheel, gave birth to the child of Light at Midwinter. He was taken away by Gwydion the Druid and given to Olwen of the White Track, his foster mother and hidden in the wilderness until he was found by Gwydion again, with the aid of the ancient animals. If the language of animals could be understood now there would not be so many secrets...It is said that Arianrhod was a harsh mother and laid on her son three fates. One that no one should name him but she... Not unreasonable, one would think.. That no one should give him his arms but she. Again, not unreasonable...and the next one....well we have not yet reached that time of the year and so you must wait...

Enter Arianrhod: I am Arianrhod, Lady of the Silver Wheel, my circlet of stars is the constellation of the Northern Crown. I dwell in a glass castle with a spinning tower, which is the mystic seat of poetic inspiration. I am mother of the child of Light. I have named the boy Lleu Llaw Gyffes, 'Light of the steady hand'. The Druid Gwydion is his instructor and guardian, for my son has a mighty destiny and must be tutored well. I have laid a further fate upon him and that is that he shall not bear arms unless I gift them to him myself. Thus I have laid a path before him....

Our festival rites are based on tales from the Mabinogi telling the cyclical tale of the birth, life, death and rebirth of the Mabon as the child of light, Lleu Llaw Gyffes.

The following piece is the title essay from booklet 15:

the dreams of trees

*“When Summer lies upon the world, and in a noon of gold
Beneath the roof of sleeping leaves the dreams of trees unfold;
When woodland halls are green and cool, and wind is in the West,
Come back to me! Come back to me, and say my land is best!”*

From the 'Song of the Ents,' by J.R.R. Tolkien, in *The Lord of the Rings*, Book III, *The Two Towers*, Chapter iv (George Allen & Unwin, 1954).

"I talk to the trees, that's why they put me away."

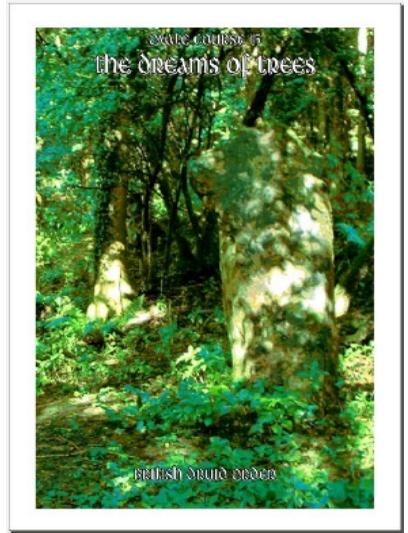
Spike Milligan, parodying the song, 'I Talk to the Trees,' from the musical, *Paint Your Wagon*.

Talking to trees and hugging them are activities by which modern Druids are sometimes caricatured in media coverage. The trouble is, they are true, we do interact with trees in ways that are not common amongst the general populations of industrialised societies. We have already met some of our native tree species in booklets 2 & 3 of this course, in which we looked at those trees and plants associated with the Ogham alphabet. In this booklet, we shall extend those encounters through a variety of other ways in which we may interact, spirit to spirit, with tree people.

I first read *The Lord of the Rings* in my teens and was enchanted by Tolkien's thinking, walking, talking tree people, the Ents, beings of deep-rooted wisdom who speak and live in slow rhythms befitting their age and longevity. Tolkien opened up for me the possibility of communicating with trees. His Ents are an ancient race, portrayed as "shepherds of the trees." In Tolkien's Middle Earth, some trees are 'just' trees, while others are sentient beings with whom we may communicate, though some Ents, left alone for long enough, slow down to the extent that they become 'just' trees. Between the very sentient Ents and 'normal' trees are the Huorns, who are mainly quiet and still, but who may be awakened to speech and movement. The idea of trees as people reflects a fundamentally animist view that sees all things as inhabited by spirits. This view underlies the following lines from Robin Williamson's 'Invocation,' (from the Incredible String Band LP, *U*, 1970) inspired in part by Tolkien's Ents:

*I make a blood pact with you,
you that lift the blossom and the green branch,
you who make symmetries more true,
you who consider the angle of your limbs,
who dance in slower time, who watch the patterns,
you rough coated who eat water, who stretch deep and high.
With your green blood, my red blood, let it be mingled,
aid me and I will aid you.*

Tolkien portrays individual sentient trees, including Old Man Willow, an ancient and malevolent being who commands the other trees of the Old Forest, and tries to 'eat' two young Hobbits, Merry and Pippin, when they camp near him in *The*



Fellowship of the Ring. They are rescued by the mysterious and primeval nature spirit, Tom Bombadil, who sings a song into Old Man Willow's roots, then stands up and whacks those roots with a branch, completing his spell with the words, "You let them out again, Old Man Willow! What be you a-thinking of? You should not be waking. Eat earth! Dig deep! Drink water! Go to sleep! Bombadil is talking!"

Tom Bombadil is, I think, the closest Tolkien gets to portraying a Pagan god in *The Lord of the Rings*. In some respects, he reminds me of the portrayal of the Dagda in Irish mythology. Tolkien himself referred to Bombadil as follows:

"The story is cast in terms of a good side, and a bad side, beauty against ruthless ugliness, tyranny against kingship, moderated freedom with consent against compulsion that has long lost any object except power, and so on; but both sides want a measure of control, but if you have, as it were taken a 'vow of poverty', renounced control, and take your delight in things themselves without reference to yourself, watching, observing, and to some extent knowing, then the question of the rights and wrongs of power and control might become utterly meaningless to you, and the means of power quite valueless. It is a natural pacifist view, which always arises in the mind when there is a war." (Quoted in 'J. R. R. Tolkien: Mythos & Modernity in Middle-Earth,' *The Chesterton Review*, Vol. XXVIII, Nos. 1 & 2, February & May, 2002.)

Tolkien here suggests that Bombadil's obvious love of nature, observing its patterns, taking joy in them for their own sake, asking nothing of them, yet finding better understanding through them, allows Bombadil (and us) to step beyond the petty rivalries, dubious motives, narrow-mindedness, self-interest and greed that drive human commerce, war and politics. This seems to me to sum up the essence of Druidry in general and the ovate path in particular.

This leads into a series of exercises designed to aid in relating to the spirits of trees, but now we move on to a piece from booklet 19, Meditations:

the power of three

What then is the root of poetic art and every other wisdom? Not hard. Three cauldrons are born with each person: the cauldron of devotion, the cauldron of motion and the cauldron of wisdom.

Extract from the 16th century Irish text often called 'The Cauldron of Poesy.'

The cover of this booklet shows a three-faced sandstone head from Corleck Hill, County Cavan, Ireland, dated to the 1st century CE, although possibly earlier. The hill where it was found once held a passage grave and a stone circle surrounded by an earthwork and was the site of a traditional Lughnasad (Lammas) fair held on the first Sunday in August. These fairs derived from celebrations dedicated to the god Lugh. Some say that this head was placed on top of the hill as part of the celebrations up until the middle of the 19th century.

Why three faces? In Hinduism, when gods are depicted with three faces it indicates that they combine the three gods that comprise the Trimurti; Brahma the Creator, Vishnu the Preserver, and Shiva the Destroyer. The many Celtic examples of three-faced gods may represent a similar idea. It is also possible that the three faces indicate knowledge of past, present and future, suggesting great wisdom. The Gaulish god Lugus (Irish Lugh, British Lleu), whose name means 'Light,' is sometimes represented as having three faces, perhaps representing Sun, Moon and fire. The example shown here is from Rheims in Northern France.



Browsing the web for further answers, I came across beamsandstruts.com, where I found an article by Chris Dierkes called 'The Three Faces of God for Atheists.' Chris characterises the three faces as three different paths to the Divine. In the following summary, I have changed the order of the three faces given in the original article to bring them in line with the characteristics we have identified as being those of the Three Cauldrons:

Cauldron of Motion: the realm of Creation - the vast expanse of the heavens, the wonder of a blade of grass, the majesty of ancient trees, the exquisite harmony of Nature. The face of the Divine that manifests through the Cauldron of Motion is one that contemplates the world with Wonder and Awe. The Great Story of Evolution from The Big Bang through the formation of stars and planets, the emergence of cells and bacteria, the proliferation of countless life forms of all sizes, shapes, and colours - what Darwin calls "*endless forms most beautiful.*" We access this Face through contemplation. Standing on the shores of the ocean, contemplating the incomprehensible vastness of galaxies as well as seas, yet also feeling the sand between your toes, hearing the surf roll in and out, and knowing in your bones there is deep rhythm and harmony to life (see our 'Meditation with an Object' in bardic booklet 4, *A Bardic Miscellany*, pages 21-24). While there is this incredible Vastness, there is also the sense of being Home, of being in awe of this whole process of getting to play a part in Creation's great unfolding. Or laying on the earth, feeling the grounding of Mother Earth who supports our being. Words like The Universe, The Whole, The World Soul, The Cosmos, The Earth. Seers of this Face speak of order, harmony, self-organization, flow or beauty and may see Creation as a kind of Sacred Geometry or Pythagoras' "*music of the spheres*" (booklet 1, *In the Beginning*, page 22).

Our final piece is another by Greywolf, from booklet 21, On Death & Dying.

Introductory sections review ways in which Otherworlds of the dead have been experienced and described since the invention of writing, finding there to be both blessed realms of beauty and somewhat gloomier places. We then consider...

insular traditions

Like the Greek Elysium, the Otherworld of the blessed dead in our native tradition is often conceived of as an island or group of islands located across (or sometimes under) the Western ocean. It is variously known as Hy Breasil, the Isles of the Blessed, the Islands of the Earthly Paradise or the Land of Women. Of the descriptions of it, one of the most complete and beautiful is found in the early medieval Irish tale, *The Voyage of Bran*. A portion of one of the poetic descriptions of the Otherworld from that tale forms part of our funeral rite (see ovate booklet 23, *A Druid Funeral*, pages 8-9). As one verse says:

*No sorrow known, nor grieving there;
no sickness, death or suffering.
Such is the life of fair Evin;
a life that in this world is all too rare.*

It seems to have been the strength of this belief in an Earthly Paradise across the Western waters that sent many early expeditions sailing out across the Atlantic in skin boats from Britain and Ireland, as in the famous voyage of Saint Brendan.

The reason why the Otherworld of the blessed dead should be located across the sea to the West is plainly borne out each day by the path of the sun as it dips into another world beneath that very ocean at sunset only to rise again reborn in the East each morning. For our ancestors, between its daily death and resurrection, the sun obviously spent the night travelling through a dark underworld of the dead. Therefore the place of beautiful twilight where the blessed dead resided, where mead flowed in streams of gold and food of all kinds could be plucked from the trees, had to be a group of islands located somewhere in the ocean before the place where the sun sank out of sight into darkness.

Traces of a gloomy underworld of the unblessed or un-mourned dead survive in British folklore, as in the ballad of *Thomas the Rhymor*, who passes through an underworld described as follows (from Alexander Fraser Tytler's Brown MS., No. 1: *Jamieson's Popular Ballads*, II, 7. See also ovate booklet 5, *The Path of the Seer*, pages 12-13). We have retained the original spelling and Scots dialect, most of which is clear enough, though a few words may need explaining. *Ilka tett* means 'each tuft,' *maun* means 'must,' *to harp and carp* is to play the harp and sing, *weird* is fate or destiny, *daunten* means 'to strike fear into,' *fairlies* are 'marvels,' and a *lillie leven* is a grassy plain where lilies grow.

*True Thomas lay oer yond grassy bank,
And he beheld a ladie gay,*

*A ladie that was brisk and bold,
Come riding oer the fernie brae.*

*Her skirt was of the grass-green silk,
Her mantel of the velvet fine,
At ilka tett of her horse's mane
Hung fifty silver bells and nine.*

*True Thomas he took off his hat,
And bowed him low down till his knee:
'All hail, thou mighty Queen of Heaven!
For your peer on earth I never did see.'*

*'O no, O no, True Thomas,' she says,
'That name does not belong to me;
I am but the queen of fair Elfland,
And I'm come here for to visit thee.*

*'Harp and carp, Thomas,' she said;
'Harp and carp along wi' me;
And if ye dare to kiss my lips,
Sure of your bodie I will be.'*

*'Betide me weal; betide me woe,
That weird shall never daunten me.'
Syne he has kiss'd her rosy lips,
All underneath the Eildon Tree.*

*'But ye maun go wi me now, Thomas,
True Thomas, ye maun go wi me,
For ye maun serve me seven years,
Thro weel or wae as may chance to be.'*

The rest of the song is followed by an analysis placing it in the context of other Otherworldly wisdom.

It's been difficult choosing just these few snippets from a course that covers everything from the Big Bang through Near Death Experiences to rebirth, but we hope this brief glimpse has been enough to give you a flavour of the style and content of a course we believe represents the best modern Druidry has to offer and are proud to offer for your consideration. Hail and farewell!

