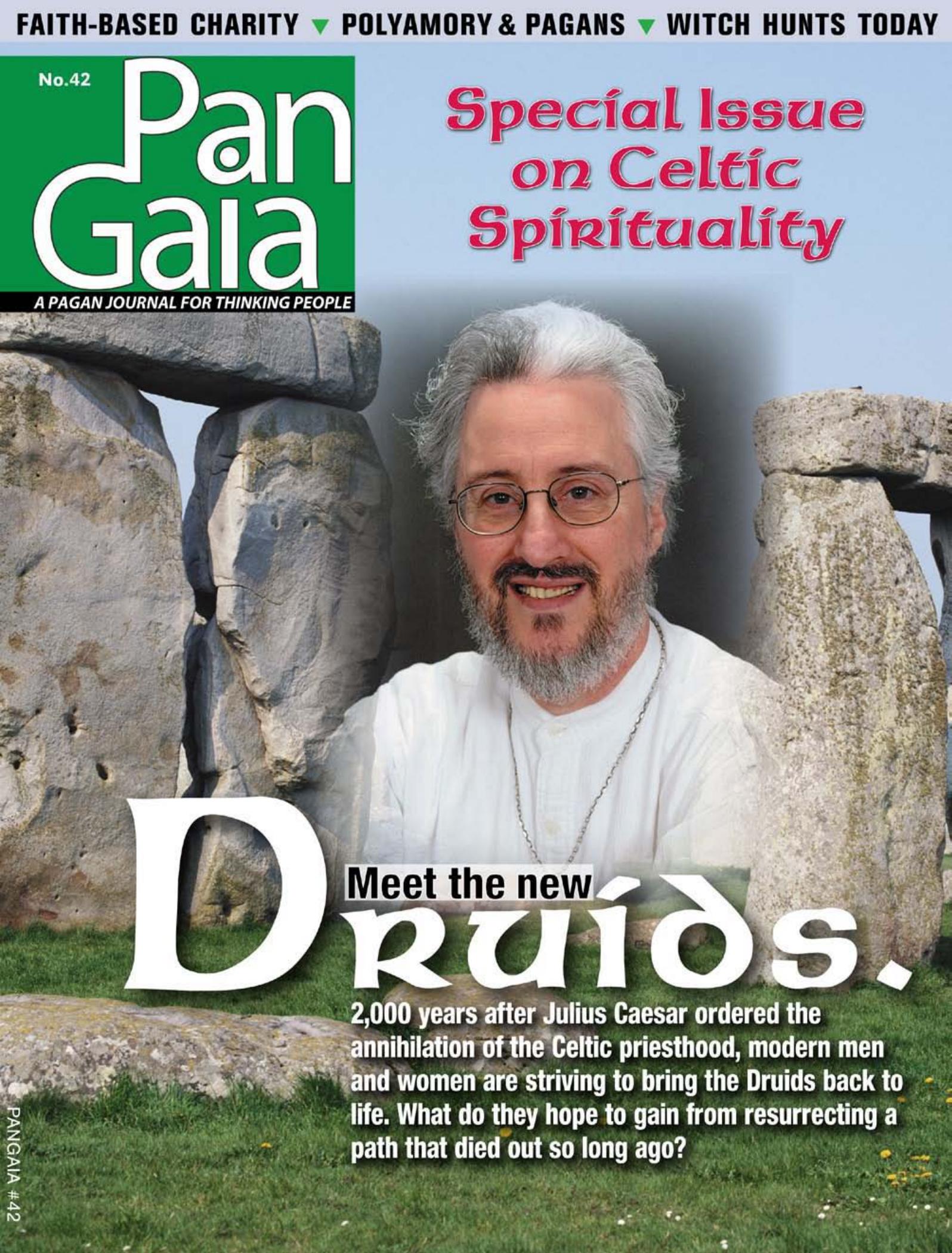


No.42

Pan Gala

A PAGAN JOURNAL FOR THINKING PEOPLE

Special Issue on Celtic Spirituality



D

Meet the new
Druids.

2,000 years after Julius Caesar ordered the annihilation of the Celtic priesthood, modern men and women are striving to bring the Druids back to life. What do they hope to gain from resurrecting a path that died out so long ago?

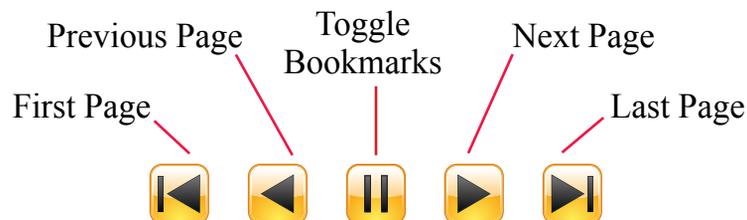


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VOICES OF MODERN DRUIDRY

The Modern Pagan movement owes a great deal to Celtic and Druidic traditions. To find out what is happening in the modern Druid community we interviewed three prominent Pagans who practice Celtic and Druidic paths: Isaac Bonewits, founder of *Ár nDraíocht Féin: A Druid Fellowship*; Jhenah Telyndru, founder of the Sisterhood of Avalon; and our “Underworld” columnist and author, R. J. Stewart. Each has their own perspective on the topic at hand and together they provide a broad picture of Druidic practices today.

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BEING DRUID TODAY

The original Druids went extinct more than a millennium ago. From the dawn of the 18th century on, however, those who set out to craft a spirituality and a way of life in harmony with nature found in the ancient Druids a potent symbol of their hopes. But does being “Druid” today mean finding the ways of the Old Religion, or creating a new one suited to the times in which we now live? *By John Michael Greer... 29*

CUTTING THE CELTIC KNOT

We must ask a very simple question — why does the idea of the “spiritual Celt” appeal so strongly to so many? During the industrial revolution a worldview of materialist pragmatism took hold in the Western world, especially in the world of Britain and her (former) colonies. For many, Celtic cultures become an exotic escape from the prison of modern life. The problem — there *is* no escape.

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AMONG THE STONES

We could feel them waiting for us. One hundred feet up most Welsh trails, civilization becomes only a hazy memory. We felt footsore when, as often happened, the stones surprised us. Near a farmstead stood a solitary *cromlech*; it loomed like a sentinel for ancient secrets, taller than us, rough-hewn, dark, set deeply in the bosom of the Mother. *By Burdock, artwork by Cynthia Rudzis... 34*

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On moonlit nights in England’s Lake District, women with antlers used to wade in the shallow waters of the lakes. In the Scottish Highlands last century, a woman believed that the wounded swan she had rescued was a “devout lady under a spell.” In County Kerry, Ireland, it is said that to eat a hare is to eat your grandmother. These are just a few of the ways in which the boundaries between women and animals continually blur into each other in Celtic tradition.

By Mara Freeman, artwork by Cynthia Rudzis... 39

SPIRAL OF TIME: THE UNFURLING WAY OF LIFE

It’s a profound concept to grasp; the possibility that time does not move in a linear way, but in a circular, spiraling fashion. The idea that history is not passed and gone, but rather that we are revolving around our past in ever-widening circles. *By Rebecca Fitzgibbon, artwork by Cynthia Rudzis... 47*



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FEATURE FAITH-BASED CHARITY: PAGAN STYLE

“Charity” is often understood to imply *Christian* charity. “I haven’t run into a Pagan faith-based group yet, much less a Pagan group that cares for the poor!” says Jim Towey, director of the White House Office of Faith-Based Initiatives. Like Towey, many people assume that mainstream faiths have cornered the market on loving hearts. We can change that by making every act of Pagan charity double as Pagan PR. *By Nicole J. LeBoeuf-Little, artwork by Cynthia Rudzis . . . 45*

FICTION THE KARMA OF WASPS

Mrs. Polk noticed Beverly as soon as she strode toward her mailbox. One flash from her little silver pentagram that bright morning was enough for Molly Polk to drop a carton of kitchen utensils onto the porch and scurry into her house. Beverly noticed the irritable shuffle of curtains, and the pale face peeking between layers of fabric. *By Patricia Snodgrass, artwork by Cynthia Rudzis . . . 50*



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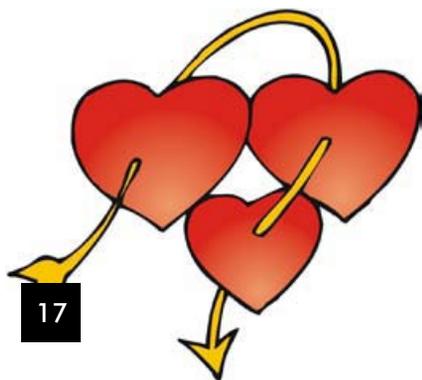
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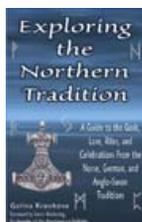
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ABOUT OUR FEATURED ARTIST

Cynthia Rudzis lives and illustrates on the western shore of the Chesapeake Bay. Her works can be viewed and purchased online at www.cynrouxart.com.

IMPRESSIONS



Working with Celtic traditions

*Read these faint runes of Mystery,
O Celt, at home and o'er the sea;
bond is loosed – the poor are free –
The world's great future
rests with thee!*

*Till the soil – bid cities rise –
Be strong, O Celt – be rich, be wise –
But still, with those divine grave eyes,
Respect the realm of Mysteries.*

—The Book of Orm

Hills of emerald under a sky of rolled gray wool, laughing creeks between banks of heather, deep lochs and shallow fens, ocean waves crashing against cliffs of white chalk, stone circles and hills full of legends — these are the features of the Celtic lands. For those of us who walk a Celtic path, by choice or chance, by blood or wanderlust, this terrain holds a special magic. It is here our hearts wander, even in our dreams. Some part of us remembers, and longs for this as home.

Along with the land come the people: sturdy folk and fey, dark and fair, wild and practical. They speak languages that murble like the running brooks and twist back on themselves like knotwork. Even in English you can hear the distant burr of water chuckling. The “wild geese” — emigrants and their descendents — often find themselves drawn back to the land and languages of their ancestors. Sometimes, too, the Old Religion resurfaces.

But what does it mean to be Celtic, or to be a Celt?

There are as many answers as there are Celts, of one stripe or another. Some meanings have more weight, but all are worth noting. Historically, the Celtic tribes lived throughout much of western Europe, from what is now Germany through Ireland, at various points in time. To-

day most people think of Celtic lands primarily as Ireland, Scotland, Wales, and nearby regions. Culture is more than just history, though; people who live in those places but have no ancestry there may still identify as Celts.

One can choose a cultural identity by taking up its practices and concerns, for instance. There is a great revival of Celtic languages today — Irish has remained fairly popular, but Welsh was rapidly vanishing until its recent surge in popularity. Learning a language is a terrific way to join a culture, for it conveys some of the unique perspective of its native speakers. Music and literature likewise carry the flavor, from the rumble of bodhrans and squeal of bagpipes to the delicate rippling of harps. The fierce tales of ancient cattle raids and the soulful songs of last century’s emigrants are cut from the same cloth. Listen to them, and see what echoes in your soul.

Some people grow up as Celts, in a Celtic family, and enjoy an easy connection with their heritage. Some marry in, and cheerfully adopt the culture of their new family. For others, it’s a long voyage of discovery, like the *immrama* of legend. Such a voyage can begin with a picture, a snippet of song, a fairytale — any link to the land and its people. Then it’s a matter of putting together the puzzle, finding out how the many interests fit together into a whole.

My own Celtic background is eclectic. I have ancestors from Ireland, and many other places. I have an affinity for the music, folklore, spirituality, and territory of Celtic folk. Long before I knew why, the sound of harp music tugged at my heartstrings, and the wild song of bagpipes filled me with a fierce joy.

I’m not fluent in any of the languages yet, but I’ve picked up a few words of them, and I love hearing them; original language songs are a favorite part of my music collection. Scottish legends and Irish war poetry have long riveted my interest. Even today, in my own writing, there’s an echo of that rolling grandeur when I focus on heroic or homesick topics. In poetry I love the intricate forms, and I once wrote a three-part “Brigid’s Braid” for an Imbolc ritual; the lines actually interlaced in a braided pattern, and honored the three faces of Brigid.

When I discovered the contemporary Pagan community, I was delighted to find that Celtic traditions are among the more popular. The modern Druids have spent decades rebuilding a robust religion, some branches more historic and others more modern in shape. I’ve watched the revival of the Avalonian path — the female counterpart to the historically male Druidic path — and seen more women pursue it. Celtic traditional music has a huge influence on Pagan music, and on New Age music (some of it dreadful, alas, but much of it good). The drums at a Pagan drumjam or ritual are often bodhrans, and doumbeks among others. The Celtic pantheon appears in numerous Pagan resources; Brigid is one of the most popular deities today. Rituals with a Celtic theme tend to draw big crowds at a festival.

There are some things that are controversially Celtic. For instance, the great stone circles such as Stonehenge, and other less complex megalithic structures, are often considered Celtic but actually predate the Celtic tribes. However, many of these became a part of Celtic culture when the Celts moved in and found their own uses for these beautiful, mystical places.

With music, it’s more often the opposite. Musicians and singers from all over the world listen to traditional Celtic music — remember, some of this stuff dates back for many centuries! — and find it inspiring. They weave Celtic motifs into their own work, creating a new sound. They’ve given us the likes of Celtic Fusion, Afro-Celtic, and Global Celtic music.

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I know bands who use each of those to describe their material. So are these things Celtic, or not? Are any of these people Celts? That depends on how you count, and who you ask.

To my mind, a culture is a living, growing thing. It's a process, not a fossil. So over time, it will naturally adapt to the changing times. It will adopt new materials and ideas. It will wind itself into strange new places. Some things may get left behind, and that's not always a bad thing. What matters is that the *pattern* continues. That which is Celtic consists of many strands, each a different color, wound together in intricate knots, crossing over and under, leaping forward and looping back. No one aspect — land, music, people, language, religion, history, and all the rest — is complete without the others. Together they weave a picture dizzying in its complexity. Together they are harpsong over heather, and spiral-carved stones, and toddlers learning Welsh from great-grandparents, and Pagans calling to Manannan mac Lir around a bonfire on an American beach.

Together they make up what we call *Celtic*.

Here, then, is a collection of articles and other tidbits for those who follow, or have an interest in following, a Celtic. We begin by walking "Among the Stones" with Burdock as he explores a site called the Druid's Circle near Penmaenmawr in Wales. Once an ancient trading nexus, it's now a quiet attraction for Pagan travelers. On a different note, Donnacha MacAodhagáin's "Cutting the Celtic Knot" questions the assumptions and myths that often accompany the word "Celtic" in the popular imagination, and challenges us each to find our own way to those qualities — spirituality, nature, magic — that are so often assigned to the Celtic cultures.

Mara Freeman delves into Celtic symbolism with her article "The Glimmering Girl." She explores the representation of the soul in animal form, a popular motif throughout Celtic mythology, and the connection with the Lady of the Beasts.

"The Spiral of Time" by Rebecca Fitzgibbon likewise explores the hidden meaning of spirals, a ubiquitous motif in Celtic artwork, also popular among contemporary Pagans.

Of course, we couldn't mention Celts without talking about Druids. John Michael Greer ties the present to the past in his thoughtful essay about "Being a Druid Today." For my feature, "Folk of the Grove," I interviewed three people who follow Celtic/Druidic traditions — our columnist R.J. Stewart, Pagan scholar and prolific author Isaac Bonewits, and the mother of the Avalonian revival, Jhenah Telyndru.

Aside from our thematic content, we have Nicole J. LeBoeuf's "Faith-Based Charity, Pagan Style," which is especially timely as we begin to head towards the Solstice "Season of Giving." Remember: "Christian charity" is not a compound word!

For fiction this season, we offer "The Karma of Wasps" by Patricia Snodgrass, a cautionary tale about living with our insect neighbors. This picture of contemporary Pagan life, with its various trials and triumphs, could come from almost any town. How well do you relate to *your* neighbors, the small and the large?

Our poetry continues the Celtic thread with a holy set of four: C. S. MacCath-Moran's musings on "Holy Stones," Teresa Noelle Roberts sharing her thoughts regarding "The Presence of Merlin on Glastonbury Tor;" "red elder" by Enok Kippersund, a memorial to trees and entropy; and finally, Stephanie Pluta's evocative "Shaman."

So settle back, think of a narrow path winding between the hummocks of velvet moss ... read and enjoy. ▲

— Elizabeth Barrette is the Managing Editor of *PanGaia*. She lives in Charleston, Illinois. You can write to her c/o *PanGaia* or email her at: www.bbimedia.com/email.