



QUAREIA—THE INITIATE

Module I—Core Initiate Skills

Lesson 4: Using Mythic Constructs

BY JOSEPHINE MCCARTHY

WELCOME

Welcome to this lesson of the Quareia curriculum.

The Quareia takes a magical apprentice from the beginning of magic to the level of adeptship and beyond. The course has no superfluous text; there is no dressing, no padding—everything is in its place and everything within the course has a good reason to be there.

For more information and all course modules please visit

www.quareia.com

So remember—in order for this course to work, it is wise to work with the lessons in sequence. If you don't, it won't work.

Yours,

Josephine McCarthy



QUAREIA—THE INITIATE

Module I—Core Initiate Skills

Lesson 4: Using Mythic Constructs

Mythic patterns play a major role in magic around the world and are one of the oldest forms of magic we know. In today's world of 'realism,' often myths and legends are smiled upon as being quaint. Historians will often discard any mythic tale as pure fantasy as they often include strange creatures, larger-than-life heroes, and encounters with spirits or deities. Modern people view these myths as either psychology or the ancients' version of entertainment.

Such an approach to this precious legacy left to us is not only wrong, but it creates a vast chasm between the wisdom and knowledge of the ancients and our modern generations. Ancient myths cannot be viewed in the same way as modern fiction stories: they need a specific approach to unlock their wisdoms, warnings, and teachings. For magicians, knowing how to unlock a myth to work magically with it is an important skill, one that all initiates should have.

Background

Myths and legends served a myriad of purposes. Each culture emphasizes what it feels is most important for them in terms of knowledge and warnings. Many ancient cultures were steeped in mythic stories:

often the religious, spiritual, and magical foundation of a culture was its stories.

In Britain we know very little about the tribal peoples who lived here before the Romans arrived, but the Roman historians did leave us accounts of what they found. Although not detailed, they did note that the tribes had priest-magicians and that one of the branches of this system was the Bard.

We know very little of the original Bardic tradition. The only way we can see how they worked is to look at similar traditions, and also to see what has survived in Ireland. The Romans, the Saxons, and then the Normans successively wiped out what remained of tribal British culture, but it did survive in fragments in Irish and Scottish traditions.

This was very apparent whenever I visited Ireland as a child with my father. We would go to Northern Ireland and the Scottish Highlands in summer to visit family and friends.

Some of the fondest memories I have of childhood are the stories. Everyone would tell stories, all the time. They were often about their childhood memories, or stories told to them as children about the antics of their grandparents. These stories were retold over and over. Each time there was a little more embellishment. This was not taken as lying; rather it was about entertaining—and also getting a point across by telling stories. Through those stories I learned about my grandfather's childhood in Ireland as a travelling clog dancer with his brother who was a fiddle player. I learned about the funny things they got up to, their disasters, their joys: it gave me a background of where I came from.

Alongside that, as we travelled around the Irish countryside we would stop at key places and my father would tell me a story about each one: who the faery people were there, who was the baddy, who was the goodie, what happened to people who were rude to the faeries, and what happened when battles were fought.

None of his stories were myths and none were 'Bardic,' but in his storytelling was the remnants of a culture of passing on knowledge through stories that are also entertaining.

I also read a lot of the true mythic and epic stories from Ireland and Britain as a young girl. Because I had come from a family of storytellers, I did not cast aside these epics as silly old tales; rather they embedded themselves within me and guided me.

To this day in Ireland, and particularly in the north, you will find most people read poetry and epic mythic tales, and will tell you endless stories to entertain you—and also inform you. In a way, the Bardic tradition lives on: not in clubs or orders, but in the old farmers, the poet in the pub, the grandmother telling scary tales to the children, and the people who leave out food for the faeries.

This gives you an idea of how stories survive. For those of you who come from cultures or families where modern realism is everything, it can be difficult to truly understand the tradition of myths and legends. In traditions that work with myths, certain details within the story must never change: they are the keys. Around those keys are embellishments that each storyteller will tell, and their skills are judged on those embellishments. The keys are the magical knowledge that needs passing on, and the embellishments are the teller's interpretation, which often has their own individual knowledge woven into it.

These days there are a few Druidic orders kicking about, but they are very much geared towards self-improvement and spirituality. The true Bards were about passing on information, warnings, wisdoms: the stories were not meant to help you examine your navel, but to tell you what to do should you walk down a lane and suddenly be confronted by a land being or a goddess.

And here we get to the root of myths. They tell you about the land powers, the deities, the weather triggers, tides of power, sacred places, and what to do if you find yourself in the midst of a power pattern on the land. They tell of the inner visions of creation, the magical techniques, the inner laws, and what happens when it all goes badly wrong. They also pass down ancestral wisdom and warnings, mouth to ear, which often are carried down the generations for thousands of years.

Not all myths carry magical wisdoms; some just carry warnings. Here is a short example you can research for yourself which demonstrates how mouth-to-ear stories can pass down the generations for hundreds if not thousands of years.

On the island of Flores in Indonesia, the local Nage tribal people have stories about little hairy people who live in the far caves. The stories warn children not to go near the caves as they may be abducted, and are full of warnings about the *Ebu Gogo*, as the little people who live there are called. *Ebu Gogo* essentially means “greedy grandmother” or “greedy ancestor.”

When anthropologists listened to these stories, they smiled knowingly and said the stories were about chimps. The locals denied this and said “no, we have little people who live in the caves and steal our food and children.” The stories told the children what the Ebu Gogo looked like, how they walked, ran, sang, chattered, and stole. This way, every child would instantly recognise one of these greedy ancestors and would know to run away immediately.

In 2003 the archaeologist Mike Morwood and his team landed on Flores Island. They were trying to find evidence of early hominoid migration. To their surprise, they came across a cave in the jungle that had ancient bones of tiny humans. They would have stood about three feet high, had tools, made fires, and had features that were distinctly human and not chimp. This was a massive new finding for the family tree of *Homo sapiens*: they were named *Homo floresiensis* and nicknamed Hobbits for short.

From the bones left, it appeared that the greedy ancestors died out approximately twelve thousand years ago—and yet the stories still persisted. Some locals claimed that the greedy ancestors lived right up until the last century, but there is no evidence to support that. Either way, here we have a collection of stories that teach each generation of villagers about a potential threat in the area. And it demonstrates how the mouth-to-ear of traditional stories works.

These particularly tribal, localised stories are of no great use to magicians, but they do demonstrate how they work. The stories useful to magicians are the ones that tell of land powers, deities, behaviour, and patterns of power.

In the apprentice section you learned a little bit about how the Beowulf story teaches about destructive beings in the land and how to deal with them. Now we will go a step further and look at mythic tales and how to unlock the necessary information from them.

We will look at a specific British myth in detail so you can see the method of reading between the lines, how to spot the keys, and how to spot the warnings/wisdoms buried in the stories. Once you understand how to do this, you will be tasked with finding the myths of your own land and learning how to work with them.

About the practical work

The mythic tale we will look at is a story that is one of four tales from an old British epic. The epic is known as *The Four Branches of the Mabinogi*, or in Welsh, *Pedair Cainc Mabinogi*. This tale is full of magic. Its keys are hidden within the tale not only to preserve them, but to give keys to those who know how to unlock them.

In my youthful days, I came across one of the main characters in vision before I had come across this story. I was working in vision upon the land and came across a room with a long wooden table. On the table was the head of a man. The head talked to me, gave me a magical sigil, and told me it would act as a key to unlock any inner world (which it did). He also told me a great many other things that took me years to unravel and understand. This is one of the beauties of these ancient patterns: they hold a great deal of powerful magic, but you will only understand them when the time is right.

After asking around, I discovered that the head that talked to me was that of Bendigeidfran, or Bran the Blessed. This head is a powerful and ancient land contact that protects the land and the people.

And this is an important thing to note as an initiate: often we think of the characters in these tales as being people from the past. This is a common mistake. Often they are timeless contacts and consciousnesses who flow through the land and are ever-present, if you are willing to look.

This particular tale is very specific to the British Isles, but by going through it, not only will you learn about ancient British magic (some of which flows through this course), but you will also start to get an idea of how to spot and extract magical wisdom. For me, as a British person living upon the land, this tale is invaluable as it teaches me about the land and contacts here. For those of you living on different lands, it will teach you how to read and understand this sort of epic tale.

As an aside, once you reach the end of the tale, you will understand this: I now live in Dartmoor, a wild and untamed place full of inner power, and when I first moved here I was given a skull by one of the locals. I have talked about this earlier in the course. The skull is probably

Bronze Age, very old, and was dug up from a hill populated by ravens which has a white tower on it. The hill itself has Bronze Age remains and alignments on it, and eventually became an Iron Age fort. The white tower is only a couple of hundred years old. But the mythic pattern played out: a skull that talks, from a hill with a white tower populated by ravens.

This pattern tells me that the skull is a window, or is used as a window, for ancient inner contacts within the land. And it most certainly is. The patterns and presentations described in these tales are often repeating ones and are there to tell you that you are coming into something powerful. Keep that in mind.

Read through this tale and my comments,¹ and see if you can spot any magic that you have already worked with. And see if you can understand the magical bits I highlight. Don't skip through this to find the interesting bits: it is really important that you learn to slow down, read, digest, think, and ponder. I have not highlighted or commented on all the keys in this story, just enough to show you how to do it. There are more magical pointers and keys in the text if you take your time to look and read carefully. Only then will the quiet voice of magic within a text come to the surface.

Branwen, Daughter of Llŷr

Written down from oral tradition in the 11th century in Welsh. The tale of Branwynn is a branch from an ancient British collection of myths called the Mabinogi.

Bendigeidfran...

Bran the Blessed, or the blessed crow: Bran means crow.

...son of Llŷr was the **crowned high king** of this Island...

¹In italic.

In some translations he is said to hold the crown of London, which is a modern inclusion. We don't actually know where the centre of power was. Also we learn a bit later that Bran is not human, so we are looking at the guardian of the land and a root deity of the Isle of Britain.

One afternoon he was at Harlech in Ardudwy, a court of his. Seated on the rock of Harlech above the ocean were Bendi-geidfran with his brother Manawydan son of Llŷr; his two half brothers from his mother's side **Nisien and Efnisien**; and such noblemen about them as was befitting around a king. His two maternal half-brothers were the sons of Euroswydd by his mother Penarddun daughter of Beli son of Mynogan. One of these young men was a good young man: he would make peace between two hosts, even when they were at their most incensed—that was Nisien. The other one would provoke conflict between two brothers, while they were at their most amicable.

Nisien and Efnisien are two polarised powers of creative and destructive forces in nature. They are beings of the land that mediate one power or the other whenever necessary.

As they were seated thus, they could see thirteen ships, coming up from the South of Ireland, heading towards them with a swift and ardent motion, the wind behind them, drawing towards them swiftly.

"I see ships yonder," said the king, "brazenly coming to land. Tell the men of the court to arm themselves, and go and see what their intention is."

The men armed themselves and went down to them. When they could see the ships at close quarters, it was clear to them they had never seen vessels in more perfect condition than those. Banners of brocaded silk—bold, seemly and beautiful—were upon them.

Then, lo! one of the ships came out ahead of the others, and they could see a shield raised above the deck—the point of the shield turned upwards as a sign of peace. The men went out towards them, so they might hear each other's conversation. For their part, the ships put out boats which made for land, and they greeted the king.

The king could hear them from the place where he was, on the rock high above.

“God give well to you,” he said, “and may you be welcome. To whom does this fleet of ships belong, and who is their captain?”

“Lord,” said they, “Matholwch king of Ireland is here: and it is to him that these ships belong.”

“What is his desire?” asked the king. “Does he wish to come to land?”

“He has a petition for you, my Lord,” said they. “He does not wish to land unless he can have his petition satisfied.”

“What kind of petition does he have?” asked the king.

“He wishes to ally himself by marriage to you, my lord,” said they. “To ask Branwen, daughter of Llŷr he has come, and—if it is agreeable to you—he wishes to bind the Isle of the Mighty and Ireland together, so that they both become stronger.”

“Aye,” he replied, “Let him come to land and we will take council on this.”

That answer went out to him.

“I will go to land, gladly,” he responded.

He came to land, and there was a joy at his coming, and there was a great throng in the court that night with both his host and the host of the court.

First thing the next day, they took council. The decision they made was the giving of Branwen to Matholwch. She was one of the **three High Matriarchs of this Island...**

“Prif Rieni”—a title we do not now understand, but potentially says that she is a woman of great power and standing within the Celtic tribes, or that she is sacred, or that she, like Bran, is a land power who manifests through the female form—which is the most likely scenario. Bran and Branwen being the sacred ravens, the guardians of the land.

...and the most beautiful maiden in the world.

He was to sleep with her at Aberffraw, and they set out thence. The retinues also set off towards Aberffraw—Matholwch and his retinues by ship, Bendigeidfran and his host by land—until they reached Aberffraw.

In Aberffraw the feast and the gathering began. This is how they were seated: the king of the Island of the Mighty with Manawydan son of Llŷr on one side and Matholwch on the

other, with Branwen daughter of Llŷr next to him. They were not in a house, but rather in pavilions—Bendigeidfran **had never been contained within a house.**

Now we get to the clue about Bran: he could not be contained within a house... he was a deity, a land power—he was of the land and therefore the festivities must be upon the land and not in a building.

So they began the festivities. They continued feasting and conversing until sleep seemed more attractive than continuing drinking—then they went to sleep. That night Matholwch slept with Branwen.

The following day, the entire host of the court arose. The stewards began to discuss the billeting of the horses and the servants. They were quartered in every place as far as the sea.

Then one day, lo, there was Efnisien—that quarrelsome man we spoke of above, coming across the billets of the horses of Matholwch. He asked to whom the horses belonged.

“These are the horses of Matholwch king of Ireland” they said.

“What are they doing here?” he demanded.

“The king of Ireland is here, and he has slept with your sister Branwen. These are his horses.”

“So this is what they have done with a girl as good as her, my own sister—giving her away without my consent! They could not have insulted me more!”

The rage at a human king of another isle joining with a sacred female power of the land.

With that he striking up at the horses. He sliced their lips back to their teeth, and their ears back to their heads, and their tails to their backs - and wherever he could get a grip on their eyelids, he would cut these back to the bone. And the horses were mutilated thus, to the extent that no further use could be got from the horses.

To the Ancient Britons, the horse was a sacred animal who carried the rider from our world to the other realms, and was sacred to the Goddess of the land. Thus attacking horses this way was a terrible crime and insult not only to the

king, but to the powers of the land. It is the slashing of the goddess power before it can be taken away to Ireland.

The news came to Matholwch like this: he was told how his horses had been mutilated, how they had been ruined to the extent that there was no longer any joy to be had from them.

“Aye Lord,” said one, “your humiliation has been wrought. And that is the intention of whoever did this to you.”

“God knows, it seems strange to me—if they wanted to insult me—that they should give me a girl as good as her, and of such high rank and so beloved to her kindred, as the one they gave me.”

“Lord,” said another, “it’s obvious. There is nothing you can do except go back to your ships.”

With that they made for their ships.

The news came to Bendigeidfran that Matholwch was leaving the court, without asking or taking his leave. Messengers went back to ask him why this was. The messengers that went were Idic son of Anarawd and Hefeydd Hir. These men overtook him and asked him what he intending, and why he was going away.

“God knows,” he replied, “if I had known I would never have come here. I have been thoroughly insulted. Never did anyone come out as badly as I have done here. And a strange thing has befallen me.”

“What is that?” they asked.

“Branwen daughter of Llŷr was given to me, one of the High Matriarchs of this Isle, and a daughter of the king of Island of the Mighty. I slept with her—and after this I’m insulted. It seems strange to me that it wasn’t prior to such a great maiden as her being given to me, that the insult which was done to me was committed.”

“God knows, my Lord,” they replied, “it was not the will of him who ruled the court, nor that of any of his council, that this insult should be put upon you. And though it may be that you have been insulted by that, greater is the insult to Bendigeidfran than to you from this mockery.”

“Aye,” conceded Matholwch, “I suppose so, he will never be able to right the dishonour that has left me with.”

Those men returned with that answer to the place where Bendigeidfran was, and asked him the reply that Matholwch had spoken.

“Aye,” said the King, “there is no advantage in him leaving in a quarrelsome mood, and we will not allow it.”

“Aye, Lord,” said they, “send messengers after him!”

“I will send them,” he replied. “Arise Manawydan son of Llŷr, Hefydd the Tall and Unig Strong Shoulder, and go after him. Tell him he will get a healthy horse for each one of his that are ruined; and together with that, as an honour payment, he will get a silver rod as thick as his little finger and as tall as himself and a gold plate as broad as his face. Tell to him the kind of man it was that did this, and that it was against my will that it was—it was my half-brother who committed that **and it is not easy for me to kill or destroy him.**”

Here we get to the half-brother who was a destroying being...and he cannot be killed, as he is the destroying force of the land.

“Let him come and meet me,” he continued, “and I will make peace on terms he might desire.”

The messengers went after Matholwch and politely relayed that conversation to him, and he listened to them.

“Men,” he said, “let us take council.”

And he went into council. What the council resolved was this: if they refused, they would be more likely to incur greater shame than get a better compensation. He settled on that council and came to the court in peace. Tents and pavilions were arranged for them, in the style of a hall—and they went to eat.

Matholwch and Bendigeidfran started making conversation and, lo! the conversation he was getting from Matholwch seemed dreary and sad to Bendigeidfran, from one who had always been constantly cheerful before that. He wondered if the chieftain was in bad spirits over the meagreness of the compensation he had received for his injury.

“Man,” ventured Bendigeidfran, “you are not such a good talker as you were the other night. If it seems to you that the compensation was too small, you will get it increased to your liking, and tomorrow your horses will be paid.”

“Lord,” replied the other, “God repay you.”

“I’ll augment your compensation further,” Bendigeidfran continued.

“I will give you this cauldron, and the peculiarity of the cauldron is this: a man who is killed today and thrown in the cauldron, by the next day he will be as good as he was at his best, except he will not be able to talk.”

This is the magical vessel that can regenerate, kill, or weigh a harvest. The power of speech (power of the east) is taken away as it is pure power of the west: the men regenerated in the vessel will become children of the vessel and will no longer have the human capacity to draw on the powers of all four directions.

Matholwch, for his part, thanked him for that and was greatly cheered by it. The next day, the horses were paid to him **as long as tame horses last...**

Horses of the mundane world, not magical horses.

... until the tally was complete in his eyes. And they journeyed with him into another commote, and this commote was thereafter known as the Tal Ebolyon.

On the second night they sat down together.

“Lord,” asked Matholwch, “where did that cauldron you gave to me come from?”

“It came to me from a man who was from your land,” replied Bendigeidfran. “And for all I know he may have acquired it there.”

“[And] who was that?” he asked.

“Llasar Llaes Gyfewid,” said the other. “He came here from Ireland and his wife Cymidei Kymeinvoll together with him, and they had escaped from the Iron House in Ireland, when it had been made white hot around them, and they had escaped thence. I find it strange that you know nothing about this.”

“I do know something, my Lord,” he replied. “And what I know I’ll tell you:

“One day, while hunting in Ireland, I was on top of a tumulus above a lake in Ireland, called **The Lake of the Cauldron.**

Note the water/west/vessel.

Then I saw a large, reddish-yellow-haired man coming out of the lake with a cauldron on his back. Furthermore, the man was large and monstrous with an evil, anorles, look about him, and he had a woman following after him. And large as he was—twice as big as him was the woman. They made their way towards me and greeted me.

Beings/spirits of the west.

“‘Aye,’ said I, ‘how goes it with you?’

“‘This is how it goes with us, Lord,’ said he. ‘This woman, at the end of a month and a fortnight, will become pregnant: and the boy that will be born from that wombful—after a month and fortnight—will be a fully-armed fighting-man.’

“For my part I took them in and maintained them: they were with me for a year. For a year they were no problem, but after that it became a disgrace for me. Four months later they had caused themselves to be hated and unwelcome throughout the land: by committing insults, and pestering and injuring the noble men and women. After that my people rose up around me to bid me to part with them and presented me with a choice: my country or them.”

“I placed the matter of what should be done about them to the council of my people: they would not go of their own accord, nor did they have any cause to leave against their will by force. Then, from this compromised position, they decided to forge a solid iron chamber; and once the chamber had been prepared, all the smiths in Ireland were summoned—all of those who were in possession of tongs and a hammer—and they piled charcoal up to the roof of the chamber. They had them—the man, the woman and their children—abundantly served with food and drink. And once it was clear that they were drunk, the smiths began to light a fire from the charcoal around the chamber and bellows were blown from every side of the house, a pair of bellows for every man: and they kept blowing the bellows until the house was white hot around them.”

“Then there was a council among them, in the middle of the floor of the chamber, and he waited until a panel of the chamber was white hot. And because of its extremely great heat he charged it with his shoulder and broke his way out, and his wife came after him. And none of them escaped

except for him and his wife. And then, I suppose, they came over to you, lord.”

“It was then, God knows,” he replied, “they came here and gave the cauldron to me.”

“In what manner did you accommodate them, Lord?”

“They were quartered in every corner of the kingdom, and became numerous: raising up every area, and strengthening every place that they happened to be with men and arms that were the best that had ever been seen.”

That part of the story tells how powers of the land, root deities, offered strength to the people of Ireland, but the people of Ireland were not willing to accommodate their needs and instead tried to kill them. So the spirit powers came to the Isle of Britain instead and made it the Isle of the Mighty. This tells us about how living with powerful land beings can be difficult, but if efforts are made to accommodate them, great things can come of it.

They made conversation that night, as long as they pleased, and indulged in song and carousal. And when they could see it was more beneficial to sleep than to stay up any longer, they went to bed. Thus they spent that feast in good spirits. At the end of it, Matholwch, together with Branwen, set out for Ireland. For that, the thirteen ships set out from Aber Menei, and came to Ireland. In Ireland, there was great joy at their arrival. Not one great man or noble lady would come to visit Branwen to whom she would not give a clasp, a ring or a royal jewel to them: which was matchless to see as it was given away. In the meantime, that year brought her great fame, and she prospered with honour and friends. After that, it came to pass that she fell pregnant. And after the passing of the due period of time, a boy was born to her. This is the name that was given to the boy: Gwern son of Matholwch. The boy was placed in fosterage in the very best place for men in Ireland.

Then, in the second year, there was a murmuring in Ireland about the humiliation Matholwch had received in Wales, and the shameful thing he had suffered on account of his horses. About that, his foster brothers and men closest to him started to mock him openly. And lo! there was such a throng in Ireland that he would get no peace until he would revenge that insult.

The revenge they took was this: driving Branwen out of the room she shared with the king, and forcing her to bake in the

court: and having the butcher—after he had been tearing up meat—to come and box her ears every day. In this way her punishment was wrought.

This is not good! Notice that the Irish did not learn their lesson the first time with the two deities/land spirits who emerged out of the lake. Taking on Branwen, sister to the sacred king/power of the land, she showered the people with her gifts. But then they grew nasty and turned their anger upon her, even though the crime against the Irish king had been settled. They displayed greed and cruelty.

“Aye, Lord,” said the men close to Matholwch. “Order an embargo of ships, small boats and coracles—so that nothing might go to Wales; and any that come here from Wales: imprison them so they cannot return, in case they find out about this.” And on that decision they settled.

No less than three years did they spend like this. In the meantime, what she did was rear a starling-bird on the edge of her kneading trough. She taught it speech and described her brother to the bird. And she submitted in a letter the punishments and disgrace which she was enduring. This letter was tied around the base of the bird’s wing and sent to Wales—and the bird came to this Island. The place where it found Bendigeidfran was in Caer Seint in Arfon, at an assembly of his one day. It alighted on his shoulders and ruffled its feathers until the letter could be seen, and it was realised that the bird was reared among dwellings.

The letter was then taken and examined. When the letter was read, he was aggrieved on hearing about the punishment that was being endured by Branwen. Then he had messengers sent to muster the Island. Then he ordered the bringing together of the full levy of the seven-score and fourteen districts, and personally declaimed before it about the punishment that was upon his sister. Then they took council. The decision they made was this: to attack Ireland, and leave seven men as elders here: with Cradawg son of Bran as their chief, with his seven riders. These were the men that were left in Edeirnon: and hence the name ‘Seven Riders’ was given to the township. The seven riders were: Caradog son of Bran, Hefydd the Tall, Unig Strong- Shoulder, Idig son of Anarawd Walltgewm, Fodor son of Erfyll, Ulch Bone-Lip and Lashar son of Llayssar Llaesgygwyt - with Pendaran Dyfed as a serving-boy to them. These seven remained as the seven governing elders over

these Islands, and Caradog son of Bran as the chief elder among them.

Bendigeidfran, and the aforementioned hosting sailed towards Ireland. The ocean was not extensive back then: he went by wading.

A note from the course editor: this may date the story to approximately ten thousand years ago, when indeed the sea was very shallow in this area.

There used to be nothing except two rivers called the Lli and the Archen. And after that the ocean spread out, and the sea flooded the kingdoms. Then he advanced, carrying all the string-minstrels on his back, making for the land of Ireland.

Some swineherds of Matholwch were on the shore of the ocean one day, doing the rounds with their pigs. Because of the sight they saw on the ocean, they came to Matholwch.

“Lord,” said they, “may you prosper.”

“And may God give kindly to you,” he replied. “Do you have tidings?”

“Lord,” said they, “we have some strange tidings: we have seen a forest on the ocean, where we had never before seen a single tree.”

“That is a peculiar thing,” said he. “Could you see anything other than that?”

“Lord,” they replied, “a great mountain beside the forest, and that was moving; and a soaring ridge on the mountain, and a lake on each side of the ridge; and the forest, and the mountain and all of that was moving.”

The power of the land was going to Ireland. The mountain was Bran and the forest his men: the spirits of the land had risen up.

“Well,” said Matholwch, “there is no-one here who’s going to know anything about this, if Branwen doesn’t know. Ask her.”

Messengers went to Branwen.

“Lady,” said they, “what do you suppose this is?”

“Although a lady I am not,” ...

For Branwen is one of the spirits of the land.

...she answered, "I know what this is. The men of the Island of the Mighty are coming over: having heard about my punishments and my dishonour."

"What is the forest that was seen on the ocean?" they asked.

"The alder-masts of the ships and the sail trees," said she.

"Aye," said they, "what is the mountain that was seen alongside the ships?"

"That was Bendigeidfran my brother," said she, "coming by wading. There is no boat that can contain him inside."

"What is the soaring ridge and the lake on either side of the ridge?"

"He," she said, "is looking at the Island, and is angry. His two eyes on either side of his nose are the two lakes on either side of the ridge."

Then there was a mustering of all the fighting men of Ireland and all the coastlands in haste, and council was taken.

"Lord," said the nobles to Matholwch, "there is no other council but to withdraw across the Llinon (a river that was in Ireland), and let the Llinon be between you and him, and destroy the bridge that's on the river. And there are loadstones at the bottom of the river: neither boat nor vessel can go over them."

They retreated across the river and destroyed the bridge.

Bendigeidfran came to land, and the fleet with him, near the bank of the river.

"Lord," said his nobles "you know the peculiarity of this river—it is not possible for anyone to cross it; and nor is there a bridge over it. What is your council concerning the bridge?" they asked.

"Nothing," he replied, "**except whoever would be head, let him be the bridge. I myself will be the bridge.**"

Did you get that? The deity/power of the land became a bridge for the inner powers to flow into the outer world, just as a human adept would be the bridge that allows the powers to flow from one world to another.

And that was the first time those words were ever said, and it is still used as a proverb.

He then lay himself across the river, and hurdles were flung over him, and his warbands went across him to the other side.

At that, even as he arose—there was Matholwch's messengers coming towards him: greeting him and offering him salutations from Matholwch his kinsmen, and telling him that it was his will that nothing but good should come his way.

"And Matholwch will give the sovereignty of Ireland to Gwern son of Matholwch, your nephew, son of your sister, and he will bestow it your presence, in compensation for the hurt and injury that was done to Branwen.

Celtic kingship inheritance is through the child of the sister of the king.

Wherever you yourself desire, either here or in the Island of the Mighty: make provision with Matholwch."

"Aye," responded Bendigeidfran, "unless I can take the kingship for myself, perhaps I should take council about your message. Until I hear some different terms, you will not get an answer from me."

"Aye," they responded, "the best answer we can get for you, we will come to you with it—wait for our tidings."

"I will wait," he replied, "if you come quickly enough."

The messengers went on ahead, and to Matholwch they came.

"Lord," said they, "you must prepare an answer that is better for Bendigeidfran. He will not listen to any of the answer that came to him from us before."

"Men," said Matholwch, "what is your council?"

"Lord," said they, "there is for you no council but one. Never before has he been contained in a house. Make a house in his honour," they continued, "which can contain him and the men of the Island of the Mighty in one side of the house, and you and your host in the other. And give him your sovereignty to his will, and pay him homage. And from the honour of making the house—something he has never had: a house that can contain him, he will make peace with you."

Building a house that can contain the deity of the land. . . sounds like a temple! This is something that crops up a lot in the ancient world. If you want a powerful

land deity on your side, you build a temple or altar to them. Except in this case, they had other, less honourable ideas...

And the messengers came to Bendigeidfran and with them that message—and he also took council. The decision that was taken was to accept Matholwch’s offer. It was all through Branwen’s counsel—to prevent further damage to the country, that was her advice.

The peace was arranged, and the house was built: large and spacious. But the Irish laid a trap. The trap they laid was to put a hook on each side of every one of the hundred columns that were in the house, and put a crane skin-bag on each peg, and an armed fighting man in every one of those.

Efnisien came in ahead of the host of the Isle of the Mighty, casting fierce, ruthless glances around the house. And straight away he caught sight of the bags in front of the posts.

“What is in this bag?” he demanded to one of the Irish.

“Flour, friend,” he replied.

What he did was this, feeling around till he found the [the hiding warrior’s] head, and squeezing his head until he could feel his fingers sink into the brain through the bone. He then leaves that, puts his hand on the next one and asks:

“What is in here?”

“Flour,” replied the Irishman.

And played the same trick on each one of them until there was just one man left from all the two hundred men (except one). And he went up to that one and asked:

“What is in here?”

“Flour, friend.”

What he did was this: he felt around until he found his head, and just as he had squeezed the heads of all the others, he squeezed that one’s head. He could feel armour around that one’s head. But he didn’t leave that one until he had killed him. Then he sang an englyn:

In this bag there is flour of a kind,

Conquerors, defenders, descenders to the grind

Facing fighting men ready for the hour.

At that the hosts came into the house.

The men of the Island of Ireland came to the house from one side, and the men of the Island of the Mighty from the other. As soon as they had sat down there was accord between them—and sovereignty was bestowed upon the boy. And then, once peace had been concluded, Bendigeidfran called the boy to him. From Bendigeidfran, the boy went over to Manawydan, and all could see that he liked him. From Manawydan, Nissien son of Euroswydd called the boy over to him. The boy went to him in friendship.

“Why doesn’t my nephew—my sister’s son—come to me?” asked Efnisien. “Even if he weren’t the king of Ireland I would still like to show affection to the boy.”

“Let him go, gladly,” said Bendigeidfran. And the boy went to him gladly.

“To God I make my confession,” he said in his mind. “It is an unspeakable crime against the kindred, what I’m about to do this hour.”

He rises up and takes the boy by his feet and without delay, before any man in the house catches him, he thrusts the boy headlong into the blaze. When Branwen saw her boy being burnt on the fire, she tried to leap into the fire after him from where she was sitting next to her two brothers. And Bendigeidfran seized her with one hand and his shield with the other. At that, everyone in the house arose. Lo! there was the greatest uproar there had ever been from a host in a single house, as everyone reached for his weapons.

That was when Mordwyt Tyllion said, “Dogs of Gwen, beware Mordwyt Tyllion!”

And as everyone went for their weapons, Bendigeidfran held Branwen between his shield and his shoulder.

Then the Irish began to kindle a fire under the Cauldron of Rebirth. And then the dead were thrown into the cauldron, until it was full. They would rise up the next day—fighting men as good as before, except they would not be able to talk. And then, when Efnisien saw the dead bodies, without room being made anywhere for the men of the Island of the Mighty, and said in his mind “Alas God, woe to me—being the cause of this carnage of the men of the Island of the Mighty,” he thought. “And shame on me if I don’t seek deliverance from this.”

This is when the destructive power of Efnisien is awoken and put to work. To stop the destruction, Efnisien has to destroy. A gift from the land powers to the people was misused, so it was to be withdrawn.

He crawls in amongst the corpses of the Irishmen, and two bare-bottomed Irishmen come to him and throw him in the cauldron, along with the others. He stretches himself out in the cauldron, until the cauldron breaks into four pieces, and his heart breaks as well.

And that was how victory, such as it was, was won to the men of the Island of the Mighty. But the victory from that was no more than the escape of seven men, along with Bendigeidfran wounded in his foot with a poisoned spear. These were the seven men who escaped: Pryderi, Manawydan, Glifieu Eil Taran, Taliesin and Ynawg, Gruddieu son of Muriel and Heilyn son of Gwyn the Old.

And then Bendigeidfran ordered the severing of his head.

“Take the head,” said he, “and bring it to the White Hill in London, and bury it with its face towards France...”

This is a really important note: London played no part in this tale, this is a later addition. When this was translated from the Welsh, the translator made a classic mistake which often happens with these ancient myths, so be aware of this issue. The text says the head was to be taken to the centre of power and placed in a hill facing the sea to stop invasions. When the translator translated this from the Welsh, London was the centre of power and the danger over the sea would have been presumed to be France, as many attempted invasions of Britain from Norman times onwards came from France. So modern understanding is that the head was placed in London, whereas it is more likely to have been somewhere in Wales. I consulted a Welsh-speaking magician who is also well versed in Welsh mythology, and their conclusion was that the area talked about would have been at the centre of the small Welsh/British kingdoms in the west of Britain.

This point is relevant not only to this myth: translators often fill in gaps with their own modern understanding, which can totally change the meaning of the myth.

It is also very pertinent to remember that this tale is from Pre-Roman Iron Age Britain, at which time Londinium had not yet come into being. Even during the Roman era it was not considered a ‘capital city’ until the end of the first century AD, when it overtook Colchester as the capital.

Many people think that the tales of the Mabinogi are from the time after the Roman withdrawal and before the Saxon incursions, when in truth the Welsh tales spanned from the early Iron Age onwards and were a mix of different eras.

“...And you will be on the road a long time. In **Harlech** you will be seven years in feasting, **the birds of Rhiannon** singing to you. The head will be as good company to you as it was at its best when it was ever on me. And then you will be at **Gwales in Penfro** for eighty years...”

Harlech is near the sacred island of Anglesey in north west Wales. Ynys Gwales is thought to be what is now called Grassholm, a small uninhabited island off the coast of south Wales. Penfro was a cantrefi (district) of the Kingdom of Dyfed, which was one of the kingdoms of Wales. It is in the south west of Wales.

The birds of Rhiannon (Adar Rhiannon) are three magical birds whose song can “wake the dead and lull the living to sleep.” This is very much about the men being caught up in the power of faery. And dwelling for eighty years on Ynys Gwales, a rock outcrop, is most likely about stepping into the realm of faery/the inner realm of the land, so that when they emerge, much time has passed. Incidentally there are stories throughout Europe about getting lost in hills or mountains, or visiting with faery kings in mountains after which, when the person or people return, much time has passed.

“...Until you open the door facing Aber Henvelen on the side facing Cornwall, you will be able to abide there, along with the head with you uncorrupted. But when you open that door, you will not be able to remain there. You will make for **London...**

Read as “the centre of the kingdom.”

and bury the head. Cross over to the other side.”

Once the threshold from the faery realm to the human realm is opened, the living must go back to their own realm. The door facing Aber Henvelen on the side facing Cornwall would have been a south door (future).

Then they cut off his head and with the head they set out to the other side: these seven men with Branwen with them as the eighth. At **Aber Alaw in Talebolion**, they came to land.

This is Anglesey.

Then they sat and rested. She glances over to Ireland, and at the Island of the Mighty, what she could see of them.

“Alas son of God,” she exclaimed. “Woe to me that I was ever born. Two good islands have been ruined because of me.” She gives a great sigh, and with that breaks her heart. A four-sided grave was made for her, and she is buried at Glan Alaw. At that, the seven men made for Harlech, and the head with them. As they were journeying, suddenly there was a crowd coming towards them, of men and women. “Do you have any tidings?” asked Manawydan. “We have none,” said they, “except that Caswallawn son of Beli has overrun the Island of Britain, and is now the Crowned King.”

There is a lot in this tale to do with the magical use of numbers...

“What has happened to Cradawg son of Bran?” they asked, “and the seven men who were left with him in this Island?”

“Caswallawn ambushed them, and killed six men, and from that Cradawg broke his heart, out of bewilderment at seeing a sword kill the men, and not knowing who killed them. Caswallawn had gone about clothing himself in a magical cloak, and no-one could see him kill the men—only the sword. Caswallawn had not wished to kill him as he was his nephew and kinsman. And he was the third person who broke his heart with bewilderment. Pendaran Dyfed, who was a serving boy with the seven, fled to the forest,” said they.

And then they made for Harlech, and they began a feast, and the indulgence in food and drink was begun. **And as soon as they began to eat and drink there came three birds, which began to sing a kind of song to them; and when they heard that song, every other tune seemed unlovely beside it. It seemed a distant sight, what they could see far above the ocean yet it was as clear as if they had been right next to them. And they were at that feast for seven years.**

This is being trapped in the faery realm, lured into that state by the Birds of Rhiannon.

And at the end of the seventh year, they made for Gwales in Penfro. And there at their disposal was a beautiful kingly place high above the ocean—and a great hall it was. They went into the hall. They saw two open doors—the third door was closed, and that was the one facing Cornwall. “Look over there,” said Manawydan, “the door which we must never open.”

And that night they were there, lacking nothing—and were completely free of care. Of all the grief that they had witnessed or experienced themselves—there was no longer any memory, or any of the sorrow in the world. Eighty years they passed there, having never enjoyed a period of time as carefree or light-hearted as that. It was no more irksome to them—they didn’t realise from their companions how long it had been since they came there. And it was no more irksome for them having the head there, than it had been when Bendigeidfran had been alive with them. And because of that it was known as the ‘Assembly of The Wondrous Head.’

Again, the men are in the other worlds, the inner landscape of the land, the faery realm.

This is what Heilyn son of Gwyn did one day: “Shame on my beard,” said he, “if I don’t open the door and find out whether it is true what is said about it. So he opened the door, and looked out to Cornwall and over Aber Henvelen. And when he looked, suddenly everything they had ever lost—loved ones and companions, and all the bad things that had ever happened to them; and most of all the loss of their king—became as clear as if it had been rushing in towards them. And from that moment, they were not able to rest unless they were making for London with the head. However long they were on the road, they came to London, and they buried the head in The White Hill.

Again, read London as centre of the kingdom: we do not know where that was, but it certainly was not London.

And that was one of the Three Fortunate concealments when it was buried, and one of the Three Unfortunate Disclosures when it was unearthed: since no affliction would ever come to this Island from across the sea, as long as the head was in that concealment. That is what this tradition says. Their adventure *The men who set out to Ireland* is the name of that tale.

Communion with the consciousness of the land and the deities of the land will often reveal a pattern across an area of land whereby if the pattern is upheld, then the area will be safe. The 'Three Fortunate concealments' are the pattern of the land in this story, and the head of Bran is one of those concealments. We will talk about this a bit more at the end of the story.

In Ireland, there was no person left alive, except five pregnant women in a cave in the wilderness of Ireland. And to those five women, after the same amount of time, were born five sons. They raised those five boys until they were fully-grown youths, and they thought about women and desired to take them. And then, each sleeps willy-nilly with the mother of his companion, and rules the country and inhabits it, and divides it between the five of them. And because of that division, the 'Five Parts of Ireland' are still so called. And they searched the country, wherever there had been fighting—and found gold and silver, until they became wealthy.

Thus ends this Branch of the Mabinogi: which tells of the reason for the Beating of Branwen—this was one of the Three Grievous Beatings of this Island; and of the Assembly of Bran when five and seven-score districts came to Ireland to revenge the beating of Branwen, and about the feasting in Harlech for seven years; and about the Singing of the Birds of Rhiannon; and about the Assembly of the Head for four-score years.

* * *

This epic tale, one of the four branches of the Mabinogi, is an ancient tale that was passed mouth to ear until it was written down in Welsh nearly a thousand years ago. Obviously things got changed and bits got added (like London), but the core value is still there. Learning how to read such epic myths and extract the necessary information from them is no easy task, and when that information is magical the task can be done

only by a magician. A scholar will read the myth one way which draws on their knowledge and learning, and will be able to shed a great deal of light on many aspects of these old tales. But before you can find the important magical elements, you need know how to recognise them.

This is why it is so important that you learn to read and understand such myths. As your magical experience grows through your training, you will find it easier to spot things in myths simply because you will have come across them before in visionary or ritual work.

So what use are these old epics to modern magicians? This particular one will be of no use to anyone who does not live on the island of Britain. But the actual exercise of reading and pondering on this myth will show you the method of how to look, understand, and take away from a myth the elements you need to work with in order to tap into the consciousness of the land.

Usually these types of myths are about the powers of the land and the spirits who present those powers: the deities, spirits, faery beings, creatures, and land features. Sometimes they tell of battles between deities for power, or they tell of a wave of humans who came before us, or they tell of certain power spots in the land and how to work with them. The details in these myths were never bullet-pointed as our rather uneducated youth of today would prefer. Instead the details were woven into stories that gave you background, undercurrents, and subplots that are relevant to the sacred and powerful keys.

Each of these ancient myths from around the world often holds many layers of learning and information. The more you know, the more layers become apparent. Each tale often hides learning at all different levels, and continues to unfold its secrets as the reader/listener matures.

And so it is with the tale of Branwynn. There are many layers to this tale and I have only commented on the basic layer that you need to see in order to understand how to spot keys in myths.

How to work the myths

Just as there are many layers to myths, there are also many different ways in which myths can be worked with and were meant to be worked with.

The top layer of a myth is often one that inspires people to act in a certain way: it gives them a hero or heroine to model themselves on which gives them a root and anchor until they find their own two feet. This is the most common and most useful aspect of a story: we all need heroes that we can mimic in order to achieve. This in itself is a very magical act.

Another layer of wisdom is to tell people which powers flow through the land and how to speak to them, how to act around them, and how to strike up a good working relationship with them.

Underneath this layer is the pattern of the myth itself. And this is where it gets very interesting for me: the patterns are key personalities, places, objects, and images that act as a circuit board for power to flow through. And it is this layer that is often missed by those who study the texts.

Because in our modern lives we are trained to take things literally all the time, not only do we not understand the faery element of such tales, we also fail to understand that the pattern is not a one-off event; rather it is an inherent pattern within the land. If we learn to spot that pattern, we can activate it and work within it as magicians in communion with the land, the spirits, and the deities.

Often a myth has more than one pattern within it, and each pattern relates to a specific aspect of power and how to deal with it or work with it. So let us look at the patterns within the story of Bran and Branwynn, the two guardian sacred ravens of the land of Britain. As we unfold the pattern, you will learn in the process how to do the same for other myths from around the world.

The keys of Bran and Branwynn

One of the patterns in this tale is of sacred kingship and protection of the land. This pattern appears as: two ravens, a white hill, and a buried head. It is likely that this story emerged at a time of major change and uncertainty, so the keys were folded into the story to be passed down. The keys tell of a pattern on the land that is central to the island's protection. It does not necessarily point to one place, but places upon the island that display these keys to a magician or priest magician. The various areas

of land that display these keys can be worked with in order to bring protection and balance to an area or community.

This story will have been first told before the Roman invasion, but it is likely the seers will have seen it coming, or that the threat was apparent from the west/Ireland. The keys tell the magician that the place where those keys were seen/experienced is a power place that can then be worked with to protect the land.

Where I live, there is the hill, the two ravens, and we also have a Bronze Age head/skull that was unearthed from that hill. Because of this pattern and how it links to the story of Bran, the head has been placed where it can continue its protecting. The coming-together of the myth's ingredients here tells us that this place is key to magic that will protect and nurture the land. The area round here is full of Bronze Age remains, burials, stone alignments, etc. It does not mean that the place where I live is the one that the myth tells about; rather it says: *this is one of these power points, so protect and nurture it*. It is likely that there are quite a few such places in the west of Britain, particularly where there was no Roman incursion; power spots where these key ingredients come together.

In the tale we also have the two opposing powers of creation and destruction that emerge through two of Bran's half-brothers *from his mother's side*: remember that power flows down through the female line/-goddess in the British tribal system. Bran's two half brothers, Nisien and Efnisien, are good and bad, creative and destructive.

Remember what you learned about deities and subdivision: Bran, his sister, and his half-brothers make up the consciousness of the land. They appear as trees, mountains, and lakes to the Irish as those powers approach the Irish coast: they are the collective consciousness of the land, and within that holism we have the two brothers who are polar opposite qualities.

So when the cauldron is misused by the humans, it is the destroying power of Efnisien that breaks it apart. This also tells us that the land powers we are dealing with in this area have all these qualities within them: creation, destruction, guardianship, sacred kingship, and the continuation of the inner line/the mother of the land. This is a powerful, heady mix.

Another key in the tale tells us that working within the faery realm/inner landscape is a key, as is honesty and honour. It tells us that if we misuse the gifts that come from contact with the land spirits (like the cauldron)

they will be taken away, destroyed, or put out of our reach. It also tells us a major key: when you shelter or work with these land spirits, sometimes it can get to be hard work that can seemingly go on for a long time. If we are patient, and try our best to be honourable with these beings even when it is not convenient or is causing hardship, then we will become strong in ourselves and in our relationship with the land powers. If we do not, those gifts will be taken away. This is clearly demonstrated by the sub-tale of the cauldron.

And it is very true. When you work with these land powers, they will test your limits—and they will also often ask you to help them in a way that stretches you beyond your comfort zone, not because they are nasty, but because they need that help.

So another of the keys of this story is telling us: the land spirits need a lot of help. If you are not willing to give that help, do not connect with them. This is really important, particularly on wild lands, as the relationship between humans and the spirits does take a lot of hard work and often sacrifice. If you walk away as soon as it gets a bit tough, you damage that relationship beyond repair. This is a theme that often appears in faery stories.

Extracting from the myth

So we have taken the important element of the myth, Bran's head, and identified it as a key to protecting a specific island. Just to make sure you understand how important that is, the storyteller reiterates it at the end of the story:

“And that was one of the Three Fortunate concealments when it was buried, and one of the Three Unfortunate Disclosures when it was unearthed: since no affliction would ever come to this Island from across the sea, as long as the head was in that concealment.”

This head is the head of a land deity, so we know it is not a human head. This means that it is something we can still reach. We know that ravens are a major key, as is a white hill. We know the morals and ethics of the story, which tell us how to behave around the beings of the land.

What the magician would then do, if they lived on the island of Britain, is to construct a vision out of the myth that would allow the magician to interface with these beings if they were still in reach. The vision would ask them if the land still needs their protection and, as a living human, whether the magician can be of service to them.

The elements of the vision's construction would draw on the key ingredients to ensure that it is a true, working magical vision and not simply a psychological path working. That construction list would go something like this:

1. **A threshold that gives you access to the land powers.** That threshold can either be one from a working magical room straight out onto the inner landscape, or through the Inner Library.

Another way of accessing the mythic powers of this land is through birds. Bran and Branwynn are both birds (ravens), and the ones who had the power over the men who returned with the head of Bran are also birds. The messenger of Branwynn was a starling. Birds feature very prominently in the saga. This tells us that birds are main creatures for the myth and the land, so the magician can fly into that magical landscape to interact with the land powers. This is done by the magician first being still, then imagining themselves as a bird and, taking off, flying out of the building or area and towards the sacred landscape. As birds are a major key, flying into the inner territory of Bran would be safe.

2. Once you are over the threshold, you need **a central point to aim for.** That point would depend on what you are trying to achieve. If you were working with this mythic pattern, you would need to decide, 'to whom do I wish to speak?' If you wanted to talk to the head of Bran, it would have to be in the hall where his head was kept (on the isle of Gwales). If you wished to talk to Branwynn, then you would have to aim for her landing on Anglesey before she died of a broken heart.

Note: to go in vision to such a point and to be with the being in distress would be considered a great service—remember: not human, no time, so you can step into that story at any point to access the beings.

If you wanted to access the power once the head has been buried, you would aim for the white hill with the head buried in it, and sit and talk to the two ravens. The two ravens are the manifestations of Bran and Branwynn, so sitting on the white hill in vision and

talking to them would be the most stable of these options. The key to aiming successfully at a power point is keeping a totally focused intention on the place you want to go, and going there without any diversion.

3. **The reason you need to go there.** Do not go into these powerful tales simply to be a visionary tourist. Although they are stories, they are rooted in deep, persevering power. If you access a land spirit or deity through a story without a good reason, you are likely to put yourself in harm's way. Treat these stories as trapdoors or ladders that take you to inner realms within and around the land.

Good reasons to access such powers would be: to learn how to live better upon an area of land, to ask if the powers need anything, to check that all is well, or, when the land itself or its creatures are at great risk, to ask advice. Often their needs are simple, but sometimes they are not, so be ready for that.

In my valley, when I worked with this pattern of Bran, I sat on the hill and talked to the two ravens who live in our valley. They wanted me to tend the birds and sing to the garden. They wanted certain plants planting, and certain springs visiting. So that is my job in this valley. And when there is danger, the ravens turn up at my door to warn me.

4. **The way you behave.** Remember that these are vast land powers that can squash you in an instant. Good manners are of paramount importance. Often what we think are good manners are not to one of these ancient beings, so tread lightly and pay attention. Always be truthful, never agree to anything you are not willing to see through, and always make sure you understand what they actually want you to do.

If they ask you to do something you are not willing to do, say so. They will not be angry; they are just asking. For example in this valley, the beings here wanted me to die and go sleep in the land with them. I told them that it would not be possible for me to do that right now, but as I get older, then hopefully yes.

5. **Getting back safely.** Always return the way you came, and when you finally finish the vision, if you agreed to do something, start straight away so that the beginning of your action is apparent. If you do not, the beings will assume you have gone back on your word—and trust me, you do not want to piss off a land being. Even if you can only take the very first action/step, and then have to wait

for a while before you can fulfil what was asked of you, start the process off.

And once you have made that contact on the land, keep an awareness of it and talk to that power on a regular basis. Don't just do the vision and then forget about them.

This working method can be used for almost any mythic pattern from around the world, and it lets you tap into and interface with ancient powers within the land. It is not imaginary, as you will swiftly find out. Don't make the mistake of going in vision to a place that takes your fancy but is not the land you are living on.

Modern people always have this sense that 'over there' is more interesting than the land they stand on. All land has power of some sort, and all that is actually drawing the magician in such cases is romanticised ideals rather than the harsh reality. Work with what is around you so that you truly build up a solid base under your feet and become part of the land team, rather than being a parasite living on the skin of the land, as most humans are.

Don't graft myths

This should be obvious, but it is a mistake that is repeated over and over again in the magical world. Some myths *travel* if they are not about the land, i.e. myths about the stars, or about deities not specific to a landmass. But other myths do not, and grafting them onto a place or an individual magician can cause a lot of unforeseen issues and problems.

One major myth-grafting that occurred on the British land was done by a man called Sir Richard Colt Hoare who lived in the late 1700s to the early 1800s. Colt Hoare was an English aristocrat who was also interested in archaeology. He was very well educated in the classics and had a deep love of myths, magic, and anything ancient. He bought Glastonbury Tor and funded restoration work on the church tower at its summit.

He also inherited the estate of Stourhead, which had a collection of cold springs and many burial barrows around the springs. His father Henry had dammed up the springs to make a lake and had started building a ritual landscape based on the Aeneid, an epic myth about the founding of Rome. Richard built heavily on his father's foundation and created a wonderful, beautiful, and powerful ritual landscape.

Stourhead is seated right in the midst of a very magical landscape, surrounded by ancient barrows, stone circles, and stone avenues. When Richard inherited the estate, it was a time when there was a marked rejection of the myths of Britain, and instead a rise in interest in the Greco-Roman myths. Essentially the ritual pattern was recreated through the building of follies and gardens that took the seeker on the path of initiation into the Underworld. And it does work, powerfully.

However, it is grafted onto a British ritual landscape and has totally disregarded any respect for the powers of the springs, the burials, and the cairns in the area. Because it is a descent into the Underworld, a major theme in British ritual patterns, it kind of works, but it also jars the energies at the same time. If you come across such mythic grafting, it is worth reaching down below the grafted pattern to what is underneath it, and to work with what you find there.

There is not much that can be done about these old grafts other than help the land absorb them into the pattern so that they work in terms of the land's myths. Do not add to that problem by making new mythic patterns and dumping them on a land they were not meant for.

The most fashionable pattern in the late twentieth century was the Arthurian legends and myths that were made popular by commercial magical writers. Those myths were stretched, reshaped, added on to, had lots of 'secret' connotations attached to them, and were then presented as ancient British mythic patterns. In fact a large amount of the Arthurian pattern is French, not British.

This resulted in the modern day explosion at Glastonbury, where wave after wave of 'grail seekers' turn up in search of healing and restoration. Glastonbury is a very magical, powerful, and sacred place, but not of the grail: it is an Isle of the Dead, a place of destruction, death, and the Underworld. No wonder so many fractured people go mad in that place.

To avoid such mistakes, I am going to set you some tasks that will put you on the right road for working with myths and legends in a way that is not only powerful, but also respectful of yourself, your own heritage, and the land that you now live on.

Task: Researching your local area

You should have already done some research into your local area as an apprentice. Now it is time to take matters a step further. In some countries this will be easy, but in other countries, like the USA, it may be a lot harder. Some cultures were wiped out by successive waves of newcomers, and often their myths vanished under a pile of modernisation—or genocide.

But even in such instances, if you dig hard and read stories and accounts from early settlers it is interesting what you can actually find. Sometimes myth fragments survive in the form of local tales of ghosts or haunted areas. When you find something like that, dig a bit deeper, while also keeping watch on the land around you: nature will often give you its own clues.

Once you find a myth or story of the land where you live, then you have to work out what is it actually telling you, what are its keys, who are the main players, what land features figure strongly, and so forth. Then you can construct a vision to go in to the inner landscape and communicate with the key players.

Go in and communicate with them: ask if they need anything, ask if the pattern needs bringing out again in a fuller form. If it does, then rewrite their story and tell the story to the land, to the children, and to anyone else during a storytelling/fireside gathering.

For example when I lived in Tennessee, I came across the Bell Witch story. This is about a pattern on the land there. The elements were: a cave with burials around it, a female power spirit, anger at dishonesty and dishonourable behaviour, and a wish to protect the area.

For your task, find the myth, write down the keys, and construct a vision. Go in vision and when you have finished, do a write-up of your findings and what was asked of you. Do this as a computer task. If you agree in vision to do something, make sure you follow through.

Task: Myth and your bloodline

Find a myth/story from your ancestral roots, preferably one not locked into a specific land area, and explore what that myth tells you about where your bloodline came from, what beings were apparent in the stories, and how it could have potentially affected your ancestors. If the stories have songs or poems attached to them, then sing them to your ancestors.

Open the ritual gates of the north, call on your own bloodlines to come forward as a contact, and sing the stories or songs to them (song has a particular strength to it that communion/talking often does not). Write down your experiences in your journal and type up a summary on computer.

Task: Analysing a myth

This is purely a learning task without magical engagement. Choose a myth from a place around the world, or from the ancient world, and read it carefully. Then do what I did with the story of Bran and Branwynn: go through it step by step and see if you can tease out the underlying patterns, keys, spirits/deities. What is the myth telling you? What are its layers and hidden aspects? Do as I did and work with the text on computer. Add in your notes/thoughts/observations in a different-coloured font (so it is easy to spot) as you go through the myth. Save this as a Word file so it can be submitted to mentors if you are being mentored, or wish to be.

QUAREIA

COPYRIGHT

© Josephine McCarthy 2015

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the publisher.