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Abstract
Discusses Celtic myth and "the comments made on it and its influence by the Celtic-born authors who can be said to influenced [her] own work."

Additional Keywords
Celtic mythology—Influence on literature; Valerie Protopapas
a whole chapter is given to "The Dark Night of the Soul," pp. 390-412; other parallels than those which were alluded to in the above essay appear, of course. I understand that some critics consider other works on mysticism to be better than Underhill's, but since Williams was influenced by his work, it is important in the study of the Inklings.

WALDOFF, Leon. "Wordsworth's Healing Power: Basic Trust in 'Tintern Abbey.'" Hartford Studies in Literature, IV:2 (1972): 147-166. [An interesting comparison to Wilcox's theory (below); Waldoff, arguing from psychoanalytic theory and Romantic history, finds Wordsworth's return to the Wye Valley a regression to the oral stage, in which the capitalized Nature of the last verse paragraph is definitely Mother Nature. Waldoff sees four main defenses in Wordsworth to "gratify the longings for union and oneness as well as fear against feeling of loss, diminution of self, and depression" (p.162): "regression, the fantasy of Nature as maternal, identification, and a reverential attitude" (p.164.)


WATTS, Alan W. "The New Alchemy." In Watts, Alan W. The Figure of Beatrice: A Study in Dante. London: Faber and Faber, 1943. [The allusion in the first paragraph of the above paper to Williams saying Dante and Wordsworth lived in the same environment is included.]


Celtic Myth in the Twentieth Century

BY EVANGELINE WALTON

I PROMISED TO SPEAK ON WELSH AND CELTIC influence on Mythopoetic literature, but on thinking it over I see that that is not exactly my thing. I'm a story-teller, not a critic; it's my business to put things together, not to take them apart and analyze them. So I think I'll do better if I just talk about Celtic myth itself, and about the comments made on it and its influence by the Celtic-born authors who can be said to have influenced my own work.

Wm. Butler Yeats, himself every inch an Irishman, felt that it was wrong to nail down certain literary traits as "Celtic." He preferred to look upon them as part of what he called the "Ancient Religion of the World," to which he thought even modern Celts were still closer than most people. In his essay on Magic he described this primeval religion as only a poet could, speaking of gods whose passions flamed in the sunset, of ancient fishermen and hunters, and of the ecstasy that descended upon those who danced on the hills or in the depths of the forest. The balloon-pricking type of person might say that he worked a good deal of W. B. Yeats into primitive man, but now that we are becoming familiar with folklore we must admit that the ancient people became poets long before they learned how to read or write, and if Yeats ignored their crossmen, there'll always be plenty of others to point it out. Too many of them, in my opinion. Whenever I read a modern, non-fantasy novel based on an ancient myth—generally on Greek or Norse material: I don't think the Celts have as much appeal for the realists—I am always shocked at how much more the World, to which the myth reconstructions seem than Homer or the sagas ever did. But then our realists seem to me to have cultivated a really wonderful sense of smell, whereas Homer and the Norse "song-smiths" appeal to the eye—beauty or terrible images—and the imagination. (Though of course these ancient gentlemen may have been too used to the smells to notice them: I admit that.)

To revert to Yeats himself: having always been fascinated by forests I am particularly interested by his remarks about the different national approaches to life, for example, the English, the Romans, and even the Ancient Greeks, "see nature without ecstasy," with the affection a man feels for his garden, where nature has faded and is only friendly and pleasant, while in Matthew Arnold's felicitous phrase, Celtic love of nature "comes almost more from a sense of her mystery than of her beauty." This is brought out even more strongly by Heinrich Zimmer when he speaks of the forest as a place of initiation "where demonic presences reveal themselves...a terrifying abyss, full of strange forms and whispering voices."

It is this sense of mystery, of unseen or half-seen lurking things—of terror somehow transmuted into beauty—that seems to me to be the Celt's greatest contribution to literature. It is what makes your blood leap with delight as well as fear when Tolkien's Gandalf is leading the Fellowship of the Ring down into the black mysteries of Moria. The scenes that follow—the fight in the cavern, the dreadful meeting with the Balrog, etc.—are necessary and tremendously dramatic, but I never enjoy them one tenth as much as the weird journey itself. During the fighting the reader can only wait and watch, but during the descent into the abyss with its awesome sense of unseen watchers and gathering forces—the horror made all the more real by the little ordinary human touches, such as hobbits' inquisitiveness and Gandalf's snapsharness—you too use your imagination. You keep wondering: "What are they going to find?" or "What is going to fly in to bite me next?" Even the reader is not passive, but thoroughly alive.

This invasion of the halls of darkness is the only part of the Ring in which I myself see much Celtic influence upon Tolkien, who to me seems primarily the Beowulf scholar. He uses a few names with Welsh formations, such as Arwen, but a whole pack of

The manuscript is titled simply "Lecture": the present title is editorially supplied. —LK
his men’s names come straight out of the old Norse Gymningfæinn, itself a pretty mysterious piece of work. Boromir and Faramir even sound Slavic to me, though I’m no philologist. Also the grim and noble heights to which some of the main characters rise (even if it sometimes takes them awhile to get there) facing or even accepting destruction in order to save their world, brings to mind the real life stories of self-sacrifice. In this play, the emphasis on self-sacrifice do not belong to any pre-Christian Western epics that I know of. One could try to read something of it into the words of the Irish King Conchur when the severed head of Suaitnail rails at him and wakes him from his trance, saying his thoughts are on the real thing. It is to survive every tribesman must risk his life for it; there is no thought of humanity in general; people outside your own tribe don’t count. In the Mabinogion itself, Emnissys displays the same mentality when he decides to die in the Cauldron to save his people, while his own is saved. It’s led to boast “Unless the sky with its shower of stars fall upon the earth or unless the ground burst open I will bring back every cow to its cow, every woman to her house.” But this is really trivial, not individual. It’s based on the general principle that fantasy and caprice would lose the freedom which is their own mythos. Aand if any of them ever hear of what I’ve said tonight they’ll be beside these learned graduates of many colleges—I am largely made to eliminate magic—one notices that Branwen’s bird not only made us noticeably very good yet. And perhaps you find it least of all in the Celtic. Yeats says—this time in his Celtic Twilight—that fantasy and caprice would lose the freedom which is their breath of life if they were to unite with either good or evil. They almost completely are out of the picture of the life of their own, as far as we’re concerned. We presume that their ancient gods. Mortals may occasionally—just occasionally—stop and worry and have quills about what they have done to each other, and thing we never even see to worry the gods except not getting what they want. They are so beautiful and airy and impenetrably odd that they cannot be caught by the bird’s wing. Why educate the poor little thing so carefully in the first place if she was just going to use it like an ordinary illiterate carrier pigeon? Plenty of us modern authors make such mistakes—where we move from chapter to chapter, but I don’t see how anybody could do it in one paragraph. I don’t think anyone would have noticed. And a modern editor would also have something to say about how Branwen handled materials when she was at best a prisoner among jeering enemies who could neither read nor write, and probably had never even heard of anyone’s writing a letter. But she may not even have had the freedom of a kitchen into which she had been thrown, a queen made a slave. She may have been a bit as we are told Irish cooks were often back even in early Christian days.

It seems to me just possible that another attempt was being made to eliminate magic—on notices that Branwen’s bird not only speaks, but can understand what is in it, that it can make us see why not just scratch across the lines about the bird’s education? It is slips like this that make me doubt that the Mabinogi was written down by the man who composed it—that unknown author in praise of whom nearly all modem Celtic scholars unite—though Arnold did say that he was “pillaging antiquity of which he did not possess the secret” and nowadays Proinsias MacCan bluntly calls the Mabinogi “mere debris” put together again by somebody who, if you take it out of his scholarly language, would never have in preserving tradition, but only in spinning a good yarn. It seems to me that the branch was never done by a man who had heard a retelling of it and liked—it the illiterate bardic author might even have dictated it to him if it was the abbot of the monastery who liked it—but I repeat that I suspect it multiple times. He wrote down full-length manuscripts in those days of having been dictated to me. It’s certainly laboring under difficulties of some kind. But no Celtic scholar ever seems to doubt that writer and author were the same man, and if any of them ever hear of what I’ve said tonight they’ll drop it in. Yet however ignorant I may be beside these learned graduates of many colleges—I am largely self-educated—I am a professional fiction-writer, and few of them are, so I think I have a right to give my own viewpoint. To every craftsman his own craft. And the Mabinogi wasn’t always a classic of literature. Once it was something a living, breathing human struggled to put through his wondering, as we writers do now, how this or that line should go.

Another point that I don’t believe I’ve ever seen any of the scholars make is that possible expurgation of magic. Throughout, of course, the third power is either a bit of snuff thrown in. Only wicked men are allowed to use magic on their own initiative. ”The deck of a magic bag given him by his immortal bride Rhiannon, but he only does what she tells him. Not until the Fourth Branch, when Gwydion and Math appear, do mortal men of sympathetic character work magic on their own. To read this entire cycle of mythology this fact won’t be apparent, because in the Third Branch here is no emergency. I felt that Manawyddan son of Llyr needed some of the magical tricks of his
Irish counterpart, Mananann son of Lir, and so I borrowed them for him. After all, if the two were originally the same person, they belonged to him.

I do not know why the Welsh monk should have been so particular about some things, for the Irish monks deprived the old gods only of whatever ethical significance they may once have had—also of their control over the dead, which comes out clearly in Irish peasant tales, but is seldom even touched upon in the old manuscripts. They let them keep their immortality, their everlasting youth, and their gorgeous Other-world.

The Mabinogi stands alone. Only a few bits and pieces of its companion myths survive. The great Arthurian cycle has been so thoroughly worked over by courtly French minstrels that we can tell very little about its original Welsh shape. Sir Lancelot, himself chief of the knights of the Round Table, and secret lover of Queen Guinevere, is now generally dismissed as a French addition. Yet the earliest legend in which he appears does not connect him with Guinevere at all, and does surround him with old Celtic supernatural figures. One small instance: we are told that when in his babyhood, while his mother was busy with his mortally wounded father, King Ban, the little Lancelot was stolen away by the Lady of the Lake, and reared in her fairy paradise, the Island of the Maidens. (A place with a name like that must have been a good place for him to get into practice for the Queen.) The Lady of the Lake wished him to grow up to be a warrior to save her son Mabuz, who is generally identified with the mysteriously imprisoned Mabon, the God the Romans identified with Apollo when they found him in Gaul. And in at least one Welsh district, within the last century, people still believed that the fairies lived beneath the lakes, and used to caution their children about going out into a mist lest they be caught and stolen away. One of the children so warned grew up to be the wife of the great Oxford-born scholar, Sir John Rhys, whose researches turned the key that let me into his native Welsh wonderland. Without the understanding he gave me I could not have had enough insight into them to write my own tetralogy. But I will say no more of Rhys, for I understand that a paper about his influence on my work is to be read here and I certainly don't want to steal its author's thunder. Since he admires my work, he is, in my opinion, a gentleman of excellent taste and judgement (though I haven't yet met him).

Without meaning any criticism of either famous lady, I do think it a little ironic that women novelists Rosemary Sutton and Mary Stewart should have banished Sir Lancelot from their versions of the Arthurian cycle. For he is the man Zimmer considered all women's ideal male—their animus archetype. Most of the heroes of the Round Table were definitely men's men, but Sir Lancelot, the great warrior who yet puts love ahead of everything else, is the desire of every woman's heart. Considering the rather silly tyranny with which Queen Guinevere often treats him (these squashed medieval ladies must have had some suppressed desire to get even with their lords and masters), it often seems a wonder that Lancelot doesn't walk out on Guinevere; and indeed, once he does take about a fifteen-year's vacation...
A

NOTHER THING THAT SEEMS QUITE STRANGE is that the Scotch,
a people just as Celtic as the Irish or the Welsh, have
produced no great hero, no mythic cycle of tales. Bits of
things have been found among them, and some very po-
etic versions of old Irish tales; and certainly everybody knows
of the highland Scot's fame for the latter, but they have
no epic. One would like to think that it was trampled underfoot
by the Covenanters, those nice people who made laws forbidding
such sinful revelry as the celebration of Christmas, but even if
all the written versions had been found and burned, a national
epic if it had existed would have survived; it would have been
too deeply embedded in the national consciousness for such late-
comers as the Covenanters to stamp out. And even while they
were going to church every Sunday—they'd have caught it if they
hadn't—many Scotch farmers were setting aside one little plot
on each farm for the devil himself. One wonders how their hell-
fire early Protestant preachers ever stood for that. Of course
the so-called devil, no doubt originally a pagan god, was no
longer being worshipped, but he was certainly being propitiated.
The ground on which his tithe must originally have been reared
was being left barren, useless to man or beast, something that
in itself must have been pretty hard on a thirsty people such as
Scots are usually said to be. They did make a few trials at
statecraft; they thought, as the Rhymer of the Laws is true, magical,
escaped hell by being carried off by the Fairy Queen, who will
keep him with her forever, and there what might be called the
shadow of a saga clings to the name of a man who evidently was
really a historical figure: the enchantor, Michael Scott; but alas,
he never became a match for Merlin, somehow, for some
reason, the Scotts have lost their heritage. I am sorry, for I
have a good deal of Scotch-Irish blood, and that really means
Scott.

My own work has been deeply influenced by Eastern mystics,
which often fits in with folklore remarkably well. You could
say that one of our present-day scholars is corroborating that
a bit by linking old Irish laws with old Sanskrit ones, and
rudric practices and beliefs with those of the Brahmins, but
I'm sure he would indignantly repudiate the charge. Also, I
myself prefer to accept Rhys' theory that the druids are really
Pre-Celtic, and converted their warlike invaders. But because
ancient peoples did get around a great deal, in spite of their
lack of comfortable transportation, it is hard to tell about
such matters. A great deal of it has probably been created
with the builders of the lost civilization of Mohenjo-daro, which
the Sanskrit-speaking invaders presumably overwhelmed. And that
folk may very well have been relatives of that lost race whom
the Aryan Celts overwhelmed. In view of the great astronomical
knowledge displayed in the building of Stonehenge—the comforting
idea of Mycenean influence is fading since radiocarbon dating
has shown the Aryan Celt builders farther and farther back—the people who built such an observatory can't
have been just ignorant savages. So maybe the Celts themselves
were only the heirs of broken and scattered wisdom which they
acquired, the French later recast and elaborated the Arthurian cycle, as our unknown Mr. X did with the
Mabinogi.

We could take all this still further back, and suggest that
perhaps this wisdom was originally brought down from other
planets in the distant past of the Gods. I haven't yet read up on this
interesting theory, but while scientists certainly don't accept
these chiroiots yet they're still a bit too scientific to be in
my line. I never have been attracted by machinery. I see no
beauty in it, and I also find it hard to handle. Make no mis-
take—it's the estate of being a great deal of the nineteenth century; I'd be just
as unhappy without my electric blanket, my electric washer
and toaster, and a few other things as anybody else would. But I
can see that machines endanger creativity; not just handicrafts,
the fine old hand-made things, but the arts. They've made fic-
tion the exclusive field of the few who can get their work
printed, and made extinct the wandering storyteller who
used to go from house to house. A cousin of mine who taught in
a famous Eastern conservatory of music once told me that it was
very hard nowadays to get people to pay for their children's mu-
ical education, there were so few jobs for musicians now. I will
say that since all creatures lay eggs, the first egg came
out of an egg laid by what you might call some proto-hen, her-
selves doubtless the product of untold ages of evolution. But
what started that evolution? If matter and energy somehow col-
lided so violently that they created life, where did the matter
and energy come from? If the chiroiots of the Gods brought us
our civilization, where did they come from, and how did their
planet become inhabited and civilized? Religious people say,
"God." Those who aren't religious have no better answer than
the old proverb so well-known here in the Southwest, "¿Quién
sabe?"

Celtic Myth in the Twentieth Century

Missives to Mythlore

John L. Leland, New Haven, Connecticut

Dear sir:

Your call in Mythlore 8 for more commentary on the work
of Lewis and Williams has led me to decide to mention a point
which I noticed some time ago, when you published The Notesa That
Waven's There, and which I have always meant to examine in de-
tail, but have always failed to do so. I am now going to mention it
now in the hope that someone else will make the study.

This point is that the passage in the Notesa which dis-
cusses the desire of evil spirits to create life, their concern
with succubi, etc., is very closely paralleled—I believe in fact
for some details, almost word for word—on the same subject in
Williams' Witchcraft. This raises, of course, a number of ques-
tions about the relationship between the two texts, from a purely
bibliographical standpoint—that is, when did Williams write the
passage which he later used? One might well claim it to be his own
idea. I have always considered the difference in style, certainly,
also the more generally interesting question of the relationship
between Williams' views on magic in the natural world and the
processes he describes as actually occurring in his novels. I
wish I had had the time to look into Williams' Witchcraft—though
as the only full-length study of "real" magic by a major fantasy
author (so far as I am aware), it would seem to merit careful
attention—but it seems to me possible that one reason Williams
set his novels (by and large) in an approximation of this world,
rather than a new world like those of the other Inklings, was
because he in some ways took more seriously the open intervention
of supernatural creatures in the affairs of men. This feeling (I
may be misunderstanding the question) is that Lewis and Tolkien
—though they maintain the theoretical possibility of such inter-
ventions in our world—are tacitly accepting the assumption of
most moderns that such things do not occur in our world, and then
postulating that another sort of "real," which usually has only one orchestra,
an artistic but hard-pressed local organization that depends on
private citizens' contributions, and can't hope to make its liv-
ing at the box-office. Science is saving a lot of lives in our
hospitals, and it is also inventing a lot of ways for us to hurt
each other, and it's a hard job, but I think it seems to me
that it is trampling upon our imaginations with iron feet.
Another kick I have against science: none of its discoveries
about prehistoric man and his world ever really gives us an
answer; they just take everything one step back. It's like the old
saying about which came first: the hen or the egg. Personally, I
would say that since all creatures lay eggs, the first egg came
out of an egg laid by what you might call some proto-hen, her-
selves doubtless the product of untold ages of evolution. But
what started that evolution? If matter and energy somehow col-
lided so violently that they created life, where did the matter
and energy come from? If the chiroiots of the Gods brought us
our civilization, where did they come from, and how did their
planet become inhabited and civilized? Religious people say,
"God." Those who aren't religious have no better answer than
the old proverb so well-known here in the Southwest, "¿Quién
sabe?!"