

On St. Patrick's Day, the Magic of Erin and of Druidism

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Hardly anyone these days dares to admit having had an experience of the paranormal or the esoteric – one of those experiences that can only be confided in whispers to one's closest friend. Yet on St. Patrick's Day, I can't help recalling one of those rare experiences.

It happened 13 years ago, when my plane had to make a stop in Shannon, Ireland. It was in the wee hours when we arrived. I tried fruitlessly to look through the window, but I could only see lights. The cold was horrific. I bundled myself up in my coat and got ready to go out.

As soon as I touched the ground and breathed in the first rush of fresh air, I saw the flash. It was a sudden, inner light, just as real as the vibration that seemed to spring from the ground and to creep up my body like a snake.

At that moment, I attributed it to the psychological effect of stepping onto foreign soil. But years later I read that the land in Ireland, as in England, is magnetized by the many stone monuments, known as menhirs and dolmens, that dot the landscape. For some unknown reason, there is extraordinary electromagnetic activity in the spots where those stone figures stand. And energy forces (*ley* lines) traveling from megalith to megalith have been detected.

I do not know if any of that is what I perceived. But from that time on, for better or worse, my link to the mysterious world of magic was forged for good.

It has been said that Western culture rests on three pillars: Roman law, Greek logic and aesthetics, and the Judeo-Christian religion. But lurking behind these values is



the legacy of a people who found a way to give posterity a human's being's most powerful resource: his spirituality.

Druidism, the religion of the Celts, flourished in many parts of Europe, especially in England and Ireland. It has features in common with Christianity that are too evident to be ignored.

Then Celts worshipped a trinity of goddesses who, in turn, were one: the Great Mother. They had a rite that turns out to be eerily familiar. They annually chose a king who governed for a year. Then, at the summer solstice, he was taken to a circle of 12 stones around an oak tree, which was carved into the shape of a cross. He was tied to it and then sacrificed. His blood, a symbol of fertility and resurrection, was collected in an earthen bowl to be distributed among the members of the tribe.

Mistletoe and oak were the plants most revered by these people. In many medieval Christian manuscripts, the oak is the Messiah's tree. And mistletoe continues to be a Christmas symbol, under which lovers kiss to assure each other of constant love.

Historians of the stature of Joseph Campbell are convinced that a connection exists between Celtic and Christian beliefs. They have suggested that the legendary Holy Grail – the chalice that Christ is supposed to have used at the Last Supper – is patterned after the Cauldron of Keridwen, one of the female Celtic deities. This cauldron was used, and it still used, during magic rituals to hold water or wine.

St. Patrick, Ireland's Christian patron, does not escape the influence of druidism. Although he burned nearly 180 Irish manuscripts on this religion with his own hands, many of his "miracles" have precedents in Celtic culture and are substitutes for ancient druidic legends, which were later attributed to the saint.

Few people know why green clothing is traditionally worn on St. Patrick's Day. Green is one of the main three colors used in druidic magic associated with the cult of the woods. In turn, the shamrock, Ireland's symbol and St. Patrick's emblem, represents the Celtic as well as the Christian Trinity.

Thus the Irish people rescued their old beliefs, perpetuating them within the very religion that sought to destroy them.

We are the inheritors of the soul of our ancestors. We are caught up in a great many beliefs that have been secretly nourishing the spirit of our culture. That is why, when March 17 comes around and we don the color of Celtic wisdom, we shall be unconscious witness to the druids' greatest feat of magic: their preservation of



their tradition in a world that pays homage to the woods and to the environment, and that continues to worship the ancient gods, although these now may go by other names.

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