



STAGE 3- A STORY OF PLACE.

In the Irish story telling tradition there are many branches of tales such as voyages, invasions, battles, conceptions and births. One of the branches is known as the Dindsenchas – the lore of places. We find some of the oldest tales here especially those that give us the lore of how rivers and landscapes came into being. This may be the nearest we find to a creation myth in Irish mythology.

Many scholars believe the lack of a complete creation myth is borne from a tradition where creation has no beginning or end, this makes sense as we find the symbology of the spiral and knot work prevalent in Celtic art which represents the constant circle of life. If there was a creation myth there would have to be a beginning and an end which doesn't fit into the principles of the Celtic tradition or for that matter with ecology.

John Muir, the father of the modern conservation movement talks about the works of creation always renewing itself:

*'One is constantly reminded of the infinite lavishness and fertility of Nature -- inexhaustible abundance amid what seems enormous waste. And yet when we look into any of her operations that lie within reach of our minds, we learn that no particle of her material is wasted or worn out. It is eternally flowing from use to use, beauty to yet higher beauty; and we soon cease to lament waste and death, and rather rejoice and exult in the imperishable, *unspendable wealth of the universe, and faithfully watch and wait the reappearance of everything that melts and fades and dies about us, feeling sure that its next appearance will be better and more beautiful than the last.*'*

Let's explore a tale from the Dindsenchas to explore the importance of story and place. We have already connected with the otherworldly well of Connla and now we arrive at Nectan's well or the well of Segias and find our soul nurture in Brugh na Boinne also known as Newgrange which is the key place to connect with the Dagdha and his lover Boann.

This story and following meditation brings together the many aspects we have been exploring. It demonstrates what Caitlin Matthews; a renowned Tradition keeper calls the 'little bigness' personalising the Sidhe as if they were human and then acknowledging the tremendous powers that they yield.

The story of the union of Boann and Dagdha

A young woman sat near to her father's well. She knew she mustn't approach it for only her father Nectan and his three cup-bearers were allowed to take from the waters. Boann was angered by this for she wondered how these men could know of the waters of life as she did; for she could feel them in her body, in her womb, in her essence.

In defiance she went over the nearby valley to visit a farmer called Dagdha. He was unkempt, his clothes never quite fitted and his hair was never brushed. He eat vast amounts of porridge and loved the land from which he grew grains, vegetables and roots.

Boann and Dagdha were in love and despite the union not being approved they met in secrecy. On this night they caressed, sung together, recited poetry and made love. Boann knew she had conceived a child and that her father would not approve and so she had nothing to lose by defying him further by approaching the well.

She walked around it widdershins challenging the passage of the sun itself and all creation. She removed the capstone and as she did so the water released so forcibly it removed her eye from its socket. She ran from the waters but it caught up with her removing her thigh and hand with its terrible power.

Then she broke through into our world where she was the river itself which flowed from the source of the well, as the river she flowed over the valley where she saw the Dagdha who was the land itself and materialised into a gigantic oak tree.

This oak was glorious and Boann as the river Boyne felt such desire for it. The oak stretched out its roots and caressed the river banks and as they met as land and water a great love bonded them in harmony.

Boann lifted the water rolled rocks up onto the banks and the Dagdha formed a tremendous palace with them that they could live in. The sun on this longest night stayed stubbornly below the horizon until finally they were ready.

The first tentative rays of the sun rose from the horizon, lighting up their palace known as Brugh na Boinne or Newgrange, it penetrated the gaps in rock and stone, caressing the green world and bringing new life in the form of a most beautiful baby boy called Angus Óg.

He is the union of land and water, fire and wind and sings more sweetly than the birds, recites poetry that inspires all who hear it and shines like the sun itself. He has birds circling his head which are the forms of his tender kisses. He takes the form of the swan to be united with his sweet heart creating divine music and yet he is powerful indeed and is known as a deity that can wield terrible magic and bring death as well as life.

He is blessed with irresistible charm.

A divine child was born....

Meditation 3- The spirit of the well

We shall now awaken the spirit of the well as Boann connecting with the waterways which in turn connects us to the common thread of all tradition. The waters flow from the wells into the rivers then back to the sea and onwards to join all the rivers and seas of the world finding a common thread that unites us. For once we have found the gold in our own tradition, we understand it exists in all traditions.

Before the meditation we light a candle, honour the sacred land and make offerings to the ancestors of the land as already set up in stage 1. If you wish you can also call to the Dagdha as part of the ritual that leads you into meditation from stage 2.

Arrive at your well, make it as real as possible using the description of Connla's well if you wish to. As you make the well more real, tune into any guides or beings that you sense around you. Enable the one that is closest to you to be a guide whether it be an animal or ancestor.

Then call to the spirit of the well in the form of Boann focusing on awakening her waters so they may flow out from the well to all rivers and seas across the world, sending much healing to what we call the world soul, the soul of all people which we call to unite as one enabling healing for us all and for us to forget our differences.

We chant:

Boann awake x2 Connect the waters of the world and recite the following words which have been adapted from the works of Fiona MacLeod and Eleanor Merry:-

'There is no law set upon beauty, it has no geography, it is the domain of the spirit. All are welcome for what they bring, nor do we demand that they be dark or fair, Latin or Teuton or Celt or say of them that their tidings are lovelier or less lovely because they were born in the shadow of Gaelic hills or nurtured by Celtic shores.

Each should learn the Mother song of their land at the cradle place of their birth. But it is not well that one should imagine that because of the whistling of the wind in the heather that nowhere else does the wind suddenly stir the reeds and grasses in its incalculable hour.

Every nation of the world has its soul and every nation can find it, if it will, and the soul of every people, destined each to find its alter of its brother and sister soul in the temple of the grail- which is the world. '

We imagine the power of the well as a feminine force connecting all the waters of the world through the rivers, lakes and streams bringing healing to the world soul and love to all lands and nations.

As we have already discussed you can connect with your own local well or waterway which brings healing to your own sense of place while the well of Connla and the well of Segais can be the archetypal or otherworldly sources to your own special place, this in turn honours the spirit of the well more profoundly as we are not travelling to one sacred spot but honouring all water courses, therefore lessening our impact on the dear earth.

Enter into meditation using the imagery and concepts we have already explored and take whatever thoughts, impressions and feelings that come to you.

EVERYDAY TRADITION

Discovering story and place is a wonderful way to nurture a spiritual connection. Visting a sacred well, lake or pond and listening to their song is a rewarding way of doing this.

You can take the story of the river uniting with the land that has been told above and adapt it to any place. This can be used to explore ecology such as the role of fertile soils deposited and nourished by clean rivers and streams. You may like to find the source of your own local river as well as its outlet into the sea. This process can be enhanced by researching a story of place associated with where you live and if there is not one you can meditate on its qualities and imagine your own story line.

The Women in the Well

I had one of my deepest meditations at St Anne's well despite its unkept look and concrete surrounding. I was greeted by a blue spright which seemed to be nature spirit of water, they were fluid and flowing not like the being who watched me build the beetle shrine. I followed them down the well for what seemed an eternity until we arrived at a cottage. The water spirit insisted I knock three times on the door before entering which I did.

When I entered, I was greeted by a woman who seemed as old and wise as the hills, she offered me a hot drink and sat me at a writing desk. I framed the question I had practiced:

'How can I help the web of life, what difference can I make?'

She turned into a scary woman of immense power but I did not fear her, she smiled and waved her hand. The cottage was a craggy cliff and above it was a huge dragon-like animal, we were deep in an underworld scene and then back again in the cottage at a writing desk.

She replied:

'This is all an illusion; things are never what they seem in your world as much as here. You are the writer.'

I asked her about growing plants or running presentations. She smiled a toothless grin and said 'No, you are the writer' and I was back on the bench looking at the well with the blue being beside me who suddenly disappeared.

These experiences are explorations into my inner landscape by visiting the otherworlds which are both within me and places in their own right. I see this world as the old women quite rightly pointed out through my own perceptions and maybe never as it truly is or indeed it might be these worlds do not have a fixed form.

This experience is grounded in my own conscious common sense and intuition. It offers sound advice which quite often is simple and to the point. This journey encouraged me to write and also to acknowledge that writing is a means to help the world. This does not mean I am a fantastic writer or I will be a huge success because I connected with it through spirit, it is simply an imaginative way of guiding me on my path. This is not to diminish the experience in anyway but simply to ground it in my own reality in order to apply it in a practical way.

For instance, it does encourage me to write and although the message in this case was clear it also doesn't mean I will stop planting wildflowers or doing presentations for it was merely to bring the writing aspect into focus.

To share these experiences in groups or with others is not always appropriate as these beings do not want to be on show. Most accounts shared orally or in books emphasis that these connections will be severed if shared for the wrong reasons. Sharing them with others who are working in a similar way of course can be appropriate.

Visit on your own or with your family a place in nature, share simple stories and honour the spirit of the place. Leave offerings such as nuts or milk to honour the place. Make it your sacred place, somewhere to top up and reflect.

I work with children with autism and ADHD as well as many other complaints and traumas and they are still able to sometimes sit quietly and enjoy their surroundings sometimes more so than the adults. Quiet, reflective time without any stimulus is extremely important for all ages.

You have now found your physical place or at least one of them and are beginning to find your own stories or are researching the local folk stories or mythologies connected to this place. Every piece of land in the entire world has a spirit and is sacred. We used to recognise millions of deities all associated with place.

Meditation indoors and finding a spiritual sanctum within is an essential part of tradition and spiritual nurture, however the most potent experiences of connecting with deity are always in my experience connected to place.

If you want to connect directly with other beings or the spirit of place you need to go there whether it's a park bench, local wood or the wilderness.

If a site is unsuitable for meditation just simply sit for a moment connect to its spirit and take something home from the site to meditate with when you get home. This is also very effective to connect with the spirit of place.

In this tradition place is everything, even our inner contacts and spiritual deities are still connected to place even if you have never been there in the physical.

In the next stage we will revisit the story of Boann through the moon and sky but also bring her place into focus for this will now become our inner place of learning.