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# DRUIDS AND DRUIDESSES: GENDER ISSUES IN DRUIDRY

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The most recognizable Druid in the world is probably Getafix of the famous “Asterix” comic books by Goscinny and Uderzo. He is a thin, elderly man with a beard that almost reaches his ankles. Clad in a white robe reminiscent of a monk’s cassock (his hairstyle slightly resembles a tonsure, too), always carrying the tool of his trade – a golden sickle which he uses to harvest mistletoe, an ingredient indispensable for the magic potion that gives the Gauls their super-human strength and makes the one small village “still hold out against the invader.” As a character, Getafix incarnates the Jungian archetype of the Wise Old Sage: he is wise, reasonable, calm (apart from a short episode in “Asterix and the Big Fight” where Getafix loses his wits due to unexpected contact with a flying *menhir*), he takes care of the village inhabitants and is always ready to aid them with his advice or alchemist skills. His life is a peaceful one, spent on walks through the forest, concocting potions or advising either the village chieftain, Vitalstatix, or the story protagonist, Asterix, who is a dear friend of his.

Even though, since the nineties, this image of Druids is steadily being driven out of popculture by other ideas, promoted by role playing and video games,<sup>1</sup> Getafix remains an important member of the Influential Druids Pantheon. His character is a distilled representation of a centuries-old cultural tradition, a kind of summary of the way Druids have been imagined over the ages, starting with the ancient sources and finishing with the Druidic societies of the 19<sup>th</sup> century England. The noble sages, mystics, philosophers, the enlightened among the savages. Such was the main shape of the Druidic myth, formed and replicated over the centuries. Returning to the idea of Jungian Archetypes, this Druidic Archetype would be typically masculine: a fatherly, or maybe a grand-fatherly figure, a mage and wizard educated in the secrets of the universe. And though there is a saying

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1 Adam Anczyk, “The Image of Druids in Contemporary Paganism: Constructing the Myth,” in *Walking the Old Ways. Studies in Contemporary European Paganism*, ed. Adam Anczyk and Halina Grzymala-Moszczyńska (Katowice: Sacrum Publishing, 2012), 99 – 118.

that *barba non facit philosophum*, it is quite obviously moot here, because the beard was always the symbol and announcement of a Druid's wisdom: "a Druid without his beard is like a peacock without his tail"<sup>2</sup>.

What, then, of those bereft of lush facial hair, especially if they are physiologically unable to grow it? Could women have been, and can they be, Druids? Numerous images of female Druids in modern pop culture, but also those found in historical sources – in classical sources, Celtic mythology, Anglophone literature, iconography and art – seem to answer the question with a clear yes. However, one should always remember that an analysis of the history of Druids and Druidry is, in fact, research in the history of a myth. This paper shall therefore make an attempt to analyze the myth of Druidry from the gender point of view. The focal point of interest will be the female Druid, her cultural representation and the relation between the image of Druidesses and the archetypical masculine idea of the old-sage-Druid, especially in modern Druidic religions. Since the field is quite a broad one, chosen examples will be used to showcase the crucial elements of the modern Druidic myth.

## AB OVO

Druidesses do not appear in the early works of ancient authors at all. This, however, does not mean that the classical sources lack accounts of women whose social functions were within the *disciplina druidum* as described by Julius Caesar in *De Bello Gallico*. The oldest Latin treatise on geography, *De Situ Orbis* by Pomponius Mela, mentions the priestesses known as Gallizenae (sometimes spelled with c/g instead of g),<sup>3</sup> who were said to inhabit an island somewhere by the coast of Brittany:

"In the Britannic Sea, opposite the coast of the Ossismi, the isle of Sena [Sein] belongs to a Gallic divinity and is famous for its oracle, whose priestesses, sanctified by their perpetual virginity, are reportedly nine in number. They call the priestesses Gallizenae and think that because they have been endowed with unique powers, they stir up the seas and the winds by their magic charms, that they turn into whatever animals they want, that they cure what is incurable among other peoples, that they know and predict the future, but that it is not revealed except to sea-voyagers and then only to those travelling to consult them"<sup>4</sup>.

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2 Adam Stout, *Creating Prehistory: Druids, Ley Hunters and Archaeologists in Pre-War Britain* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008), 127.

3 Nora Kershaw Chadwick and Anne Ross, *The Druids* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1997), 79.

4 Pomponius Mela, *De Situ Orbis*, 3.48 = *Pomponius Mela's Description of the World*, tr. Frank E. Romer, Ann Arbor 2001, The University of Michigan Press, 115.

The author puts special emphasis on the supernatural powers held by these priestesses of an unnamed, mysterious Gallic deity. Their main activity seems to have been augury, since the island was said to harbor an oracle (*Gallici numinis oraculo insignis est*). In the classical division of the Celtic tribes' intelligentsia, as proposed by Strabo, they would therefore be qualified as *vates*, though Druids themselves were also said to have oracular powers – at least according to Cicero and his meeting with Divitiacus, who “claimed to have that knowledge of nature which the Greeks call physiologia, and he used to make predictions, sometimes by means of augury and sometimes by means of conjecture”<sup>5</sup>. Divination seems to have been the chief prerogative of those Celtic women who had any connection to the world of gods and spirits: Tacitus, for example, mentions a Germanic soothsayer by the Celtic name of Veleda (*gwel/wel* – to see, *welet* – diviner, seer), supposedly a contemporary of Vespasianus and the leader and representative of the Teutonic tribe of Bructeri.<sup>6</sup> According to later sources, predicting the future was supposed to be the occupation of Gallic “dryads” (*dryades*), meaning Druidesses. Both Aelius Lampridus and Flavius Vopiscus mention Druidesses who lent their skills to Roman leaders, including Emperors.

The first literal mention of a Druidess, or woman-Druid (*mulier druias/dryas*) can be found in the story of Alexander Severus, who had set out on a military expedition to aid the Gauls against Germanic invaders around the year 235. When he “went to war a Druid prophetess cried out in the Gallic tongue (*mulier Druias eunti exclamavit Gallico sermone*), “Go, but do not hope for victory, and put no trust in your soldiers”<sup>7</sup>. Flavius Vopiscus, a Roman historian of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, mentions a Druidess as well, in an anecdote on the life of young Diocletian, before his rise to power: ““When Diocletian,” he said, “while still serving in a minor post, was stopping at a certain tavern in the land of the Tungri in Gaul, and was making up his daily reckoning with a woman, who was a Druidess (*druia*), she said to him, ‘Diocletian, you are far too greedy and far too stingy,’ to which Diocletian replied, it is said, not in earnest, but only in jest, ‘I shall be generous enough when I become emperor.””<sup>8</sup> Another biography claims that he was not the only one to take counsel from Gallic women: “For he used to relate that on a certain occasion Aurelian consulted the Druid priestesses (*druiad*) in Gaul and inquired of them whether the imperial power would remain with his descendants, but they replied, he related, that none would have a name more

5 Marcus Tullius Cicero, *De Divinatione*, I, 41. 90 = *On Divination*, tr. William P. Thayer, Loeb Classical Library 1923, 323.

6 Publius Cornelius Tacitus, *Historiae*, 4. 60-61.

7 Aelius Lampridus, *Alexander Severus*, 60.1 = *Historia Augusta. The Life of Alexander Severus*, tr. David Magie, Loeb Classical Library, 1924, 301.

8 Flavius Vopiscus, *Numerianus*, 14. 2-3 = *Historia Augusta. The Lives of Carus, Carinus and Numerian*, tr. David Magie, Loeb Classical Library, 1932, 439.

illustrious in the commonwealth than the descendants of Claudius.”<sup>9</sup> Thus, classical sources mention Druidesses – or the Gallic dryads (they are identified as Druids *per analogiam*, since other authors of Antiquity have sometimes modified or misspelled the term *Druides* into *dryades* or similar) – mainly as performing divinations<sup>10</sup>. Since Druids, as a social class, did not exist anymore in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, the ties these women could have to actual *druides* class can be disputed: they could have been the descendants of Druids, or Celtic societies could have retained the association of divination practices and soothsaying with the Druids of yore.<sup>11</sup> Another explanation could lie in an ongoing “pauperization” of the word “Druid” – while it started as a word describing a member of the social class responsible for ritualistic practices and lore-keeping, it could have broadened its semantic capacity over the centuries to include all those who practice magical arts, be they magicians, soothsayers, prophets, or others. As Druidry historian Ronald Hutton points out “It is possible that terms related to Druid were being applied by Roman authors who knew little of Gaul and Gallic language, to kinds of magical practitioner very different from the original Druids”<sup>12</sup>. Regardless of our interpretation of these classical accounts, the antique sources are a solid foundation for the myth of a Druidess: a woman holding an important religious position in Celtic societies.

## RECEPTION

One of the sources that fuels the Druidess myth is Irish mythology, which itself formed a new mythical content, being the work of authors distant from Antiquity.<sup>13</sup> The image of Druidesses in mythical tales has in itself already been modified and re-shaped, and in fact, the mages and wizards of the Celtic legends may only share their name with the actual Druids of Antiquity. These mythological stories, however, still promoted a specific image of Druidesses. The female Druids

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9 Flavius Vopiscus, *Aurelianus*, 44.4 = *Historia Augusta. The Life of Aurelian*, tr. David Magie, Loeb Classical Library, 1932, 283.

10 For that, a classical author on the subject of Druids, Thomas Kendrick, associated those women with *vates* (or heirs of this tradition), rather than *druides*, Thomas D. Kendrick, *The Druids. A Study in Celtic Prehistory* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1927), 97.

11 Philip Freeman, *War, Women, and Druids: Eyewitness Reports and Early Accounts of the Ancient Celts* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 50.

12 Ronald Hutton, *Blood and Mistletoe: The History of the Druids in Britain* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 21.

13 Stuart Piggott, *The Druids* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1985), 21.

(*bandruuid*, *bándruí*<sup>14</sup>) of Irish mythology are primarily mages and diviners. Medb, the queen of Connacht appearing in the Ulster cycle, consults a diviner<sup>15</sup> Fidelma or Fedelma.<sup>16</sup> *Dindsenchas* mentions Gaine, “daughter of pure Gumor, nurse of mead-loving Mide” who “was learned and a seer and a chief Druid (*prim-driú*)”.<sup>17</sup> Similarly to the case of the classical accounts of Alexander Severus or Diocletian, one cannot be sure whether these female oracles of mythical tales had actual links with Druids, or did the word simply mean “sorceress” (old Irish *druidecht*, for example, means “magic” or “sorcery”). It is also noteworthy, that in the opinion of scholars<sup>18</sup>, Druidesses are not often mentioned in the medieval texts (with the usage of the name). The figures of witches, women-warriors, prophetesses and other magical or holy women, are often connected with Druidry or they are called Druidesses by the means of association<sup>19</sup>, as they dealt with similar issues to those which the Druids probably did. Therefore it is only one of the many possible interpretations of the provenience of these characters<sup>20</sup>. The occurrence of Druidesses or hypothetical Druidesses in medieval Irish literature is not evidence that there were actually female Druids in the Ancient times. Firstly, we must remember that those literary sources are a product of a different cultural context. Secondly, the mentioned discourse on the semantic of the term “druidry” (and its association with magic) may apply here as well.<sup>21</sup>

Despite the presence of female practitioners in classical accounts, their characters were not popular among those exploring the Druidic myth. The mythological discourse has been dominated by the masculine image, which is, on one side, due to the patriarchal structure of the societies that have explored the Druidic myth, and on the other, due to the sheer amount of historical accounts of male Druids, which outweighs the few mentions of female Druids. Starting with the Druidic inspirations present in late renaissance, the stately philosopher

14 The female characters of *filí*, poets and seers, are also present in the literature (*bánfaid*, *bánfile*).

15 a woman-*filí*, Paul R. Lonigan, *The Druids: Priest of the Ancient Celts* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1996), 90. A remark may be added here, that areas of activity of Druids and filides sometimes do overlap.

16 Patrick Lavin, *The Shaping of the Celtic World: And the Resurgence of the Celtic Consciousness in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (Bloomington: iUniverse, 2011), 192.

17 *The Metrical Dindsenchas*, poem 6, ver. 10 tr., ed. Edward J. Gwynn, source = *CELT The Corpus of Electronic Texts*.

18 Miranda Jane Green, *Exploring the World of the Druids* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2005), 101; Kendrick, *The Druids*, 97.

19 Like in Peter Berresford Ellis, *The Druids* (London: Constable, 1994), 99–112.

20 So the occurrence of female Druids in those tales is not “quite explicit” nor any character can be called “undoubtedly a Druidess”, Ellis, *The Druids*, 99,104.

21 Ronald Hutton, *Blood and Mistletoe: The History of the Druids in Britain* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 43-44.

became the principal image of Druids that Europeans had held. Even if they were portrayed as practicing bloody human sacrifice, Druids were still long-bearded sages in white robes.

One of the most important representations of a Druid, that has become a prototype for all later images, is the illustration in Aylett Sames's *Britania Antiqua Illustrata* (1676).<sup>22</sup> It shows an old man with a knee-reaching beard, wearing a hooded, traveler's robe that resembles a shortened monk's frock (his calves are exposed). He holds a wooden hiking staff in one hand and a tome in the other (which will transform, in later versions of the illustration, into "more Druidic" mistletoe). Commenters have noted that the visualization of a Druid from *Britania Antiqua Illustrata* is mostly based on images of traveling monks, Christian saints or hermits.<sup>23</sup> As such, it is consistent with that aspect of Druidic myth, in which Druids become adherents of Christianity, or are said to have been believers in some form of a proto-monotheistic religion, preparing the pagan inhabitants of the Isles for the coming of Christ. Druids have also been represented as wearing garb similar to Roman togas (sometimes put over a loose, ankle-length robe), always white – this follows the account of Pliny the Elder<sup>24</sup> that *sacerdos candida veste*, "a white-clad priest" was cutting mistletoe with a golden sickle (whether he was actually a Druid remains in the realm of speculation). An interesting image of a Druid can be found on the cover of Elias Shedijs's *De Dis Germanis*:<sup>25</sup> the classic bearded man wears a white robe tied with a length of rope, a shirt reminiscent of a chasuble and a laurel wreath on his head. The scene itself is rather grim, as the old man holds a bent knife, and by his feet lie two decapitated bodies. There is another person present in the illustration – possibly a Druidess assisting in the bloody ceremony, in a white dress covered with a length of cloth similar to a toga (her left shoulder is bare), using two shinbones to play a drum and with a human skull tethered to her belt. They are pictured standing in a sacred grove of sorts, with an oak tree at the center, surrounded by more decapitated bodies. This image represents the cruel myth of Druids, born of the early Roman Empire accounts.<sup>26</sup> In iconography, Druidesses often appear in Roman garb, as seen in the romantic and symbolic visions of French painters such as Alexandre Cabanel (1823-1899) or Armand Laroche (1826-1903). White-clad women also assist Druids during a solemn ceremony on Henri Paul Motte's (1846-1922) "Druids Cutting Down the Mistletoe on the Sixth Day of the Moon." Possibly, the

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22 Aylett Sames, *Britania Antiqua Illustrata or the Antiquities of Ancient Britain* (London, 1676), 101.

23 John T. Koch, *Celtic Culture: a Historical Encyclopedia* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2006), 614.

24 Plinius Secundus, *Naturalis Historia*, XVI, 249.

25 Elias Shedijs, *De Dis Germanis* (Amsterdam, 1648).

26 Adam Anczyk, "Druidzi i ofiary z ludzi: krótka historia mitu", *Przegląd Religioznawczy* 245, no. 3 (2012): 21–32.



authors of these woodcuts and paintings were inspired by the representations of Roman priestesses and goddesses. Lionel Royer's painting "The Druidess" (depicting a young woman in a crown of mistletoe, with a torc and a golden sickle, her hand raised in a blessing gesture), with its lunar symbolism, puts the Druidess very close to the goddess Diana/Artemis.<sup>27</sup>

In 1831, in the La Scala opera house of Milan, a union of myths was made between the male, old sage and the female, Celtic priestess. Vincenzo Bellini's "Norma," with libretto by an Italian playwright Felice Romani, tells the story of an Arch-Druid's daughter in a relationship with a Roman soldier Pollione, and of the man's feelings shifting towards another woman – Adalgisa, also a priestess. (A priestess protagonist also appears in Romani's earlier work, libretto for *La Sacerdotessa d'Irminsul*<sup>28</sup> by Giovanni Pacini.) The opera was originally intended to refer to Druids in the title – working titles included *La selva Druidica*, *La Druidessa* or *I Druidi*, but maestro was not content with them and finally settled for the heroine's name.<sup>29</sup> The opera opens with a council held by the Druids who oppose Romans, led by Arch-Druid Oroveso (*Ite sul colle, o Druidi*). Traditional stagings have represented Druids in accordance with the established iconography – white robes, long beards, mistletoe or oak leaf wreaths, sometimes golden accessories inspired by archeological finds. Priestesses appear in long dresses, sometimes with wreaths or veils on their heads. The titular protagonist is a tragic heroine, a priestess who broke her chastity vows and who, in the opera's climax, makes a sacrifice of herself by entering a burning pyre. She is also a worshipper of the female divinity – in her famous aria *Casta Diva*, Norma prays to a goddess, asking for peace.

While Druidesses may have appeared in art, they had not made it to the images accepted by the first neo-Druidic organizations: the British para-masonic fraternities of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, whose idea of a Druid was the familiar white-bearded philosopher. Interestingly enough, since full beards were not fashionable at the time, the members of the oldest neo-Druidic fraternity, Ancient Order of Druids, used fake ceremonial beards<sup>30</sup> (which, as reported by Ronald Hutton, raised concerns among some members as a possible means of tuberculosis transmission<sup>31</sup>). Their Druid attire also included a long, hooded white robe and a sickle, often mounted on a long staff. This kind of accoutrement

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27 James R. Lewis, *Witchcraft Today: An Encyclopedia of Wiccan and Neopagan Traditions* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 1999), 78.

28 Elena Percivaldi, *I Celti: Una Civiltà Europea* (Firenze: Giunti Editore, 2003), 160–161.

29 David R. B. Kimbell, *Vincenzo Bellini: Norma* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 13.

30 Barry Cunliffe, *Druids: a Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 126.

31 Ronald Hutton, *Blood and Mistletoe: The History of the Druids in Britain* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 320.



could have been controversial, as testified by George Bernard Shaw in his “Back to Methuselah”: “he has to dress-up in a Druid’s robe, and put on a wig and a long false beard, to impress you silly people”<sup>32</sup>. As the organization progressed, members of the Ancient Order of Druids abandoned the fake beards, though they introduced a different, puzzling element – a white veil reminiscent of a *nemes*, the headgear of Egyptian Pharaohs. (This was related to their idea that Druids were the heirs and keepers of ancient, occult lore that hailed from Ancient Egypt). Initially, women had little role to play in such organizations (though they were present in the Welsh traditions of *eisteddfod* and *gorsedd*), but social change had reached Druidic fraternities as well. The Noble Order of Female Druids<sup>33</sup> is founded in 1853, and by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, female Druidic lodges appear; over a dozen the 1920’s. In 1900, Lady Poore of Amesbury proclaims herself the first Arch-Druidess of the Isles, and leads an exclusively female neo-Druidic group.<sup>34</sup> However, it was not the actions of Druidic suffragettes that brought the change into neo-Druidic organizations. It was the contact of Druidry with other forms of Neo-Paganism, which emerged and grew in the 1960-70’s.

## MODERN DRUIDESSES

The presence of women among adherents and sympathizers of Druidry is nothing extraordinary nowadays. Practically all Druidic organizations state the equality of men and women, both in secular and sacral matters, priest functions or participation in rituals. Of course, this was not a sudden phenomenon: in the American organization known as The Reformed Druids of North America, which began as a *joke religion* in the USA (1963), women could not initially access any important functions. The precepts agreed upon in 1964 forbade the female members of the Reformed Druids of North America to hold any higher post in the organization’s structure or to perform full priestly duties; women were expected to be a priest “not of the Order, but rather a priest unto the Order”, and “no priestess shall be admitted into the councils of the priesthood, but rather she shall be given unto one of them as a gift of service to beauty”<sup>35</sup>. Soon enough – in 1971 – this was changed and the new regulations no longer barred women from higher initiation levels or leader posts.

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32 George Bernard Shaw, *Back to Methuselah (A Metabiological Pentateuch)*, Edition 2010, (The Floating Press), 418.

33 Ronald Hutton, *The Druids* (Continuum International Publishing Group, 2007), 147.

34 Rosemary Hill, *Stonehenge* (London: Profile Books, 2010), 133.

35 *A Reformed Druid Anthology*, ed. Isaac Bonewits, Robert Larson, Michael Scharding, (Northfield: The Drynemetum Press, 1996), 22.

The two currently most prominent – and largest – Druidic organizations both proclaim men and women to be equal: a short excerpt of creed followed by the members of Ár nDraíocht Féin includes the statement that “women and men are spiritually equal, and “masculine” and “feminine” attitudes, values, and roles are of equal importance.”<sup>36</sup> So does the Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids, whose question and answer section includes the question “Is there any gender bias in the Order?” answered: “Not at all. Membership is divided almost equally between women and men, with there probably now being more women than men in the Order. And women and men are equally involved in the administration and direction of the Order”<sup>37</sup>. The Order had evolved from a para-masonic group of Druidic revival, and it does not deny its historical roots, while embracing social change that followed: “Druidry was influenced by Freemasonry in the 18th and 19th centuries – a period not noted for its belief in the equality of the sexes – and consequently in those times it tended to be male-dominated. But this no longer applies in modern Druidry as taught by The Order of Bards Ovates & Druids”<sup>38</sup>. Although the two largest Druidic organizations have been founded by men, they currently include numerous women on important organizational posts, as priestesses or holding the highest initiation degrees. Another organization should be noted in this context, the British Druid Order, which since 1995 is governed by Philip Shallcrass and Emma Restall-Orr (till 2002) – possibly the most well-known and recognizable woman in the modern Druidic movement. Author of numerous works on Druidry, pagan ethics, and the role of women in neo-paganism, she is concerned with the female aspect of Druidry, offering guidance to women interested in druidic spirituality.<sup>39</sup> She makes references to the “dark side” of femininity as well.<sup>40</sup> The popularity of books by Emma Restall-Orr proves the interest, and the influence women have on modern Druidry, both its social activities and religious doctrine. Books by other authors, aiming to promote and guide the reader through feminine Druidry, are also available on the market.<sup>41</sup>

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36 Isaac Bonewits, *What Do Neopagan Druids Believe?* (<https://www.adf.org/about/basics/beliefs.html>, access: May 2014); full text: Isaac Bonewits, “What do Neopagan Druids Believe?”, *The Druid's Progress*, 1984/1, 11–14.

37 *Frequently Asked Questions* (<http://www.Druidry.org/about-us/frequently-asked-questions>; access: May 2014).

38 *Ibidem*.

39 Emma Restall Orr, *Spirits of the Sacred Grove: The World of a Druid Priestess* (London: Thorsons Pub, 1998); Emma Restall Orr, *Druid Priestess: An Intimate Journey Through the Pagan Year* (London: Thorsons Pub, 2001).

40 Emma Restall Orr, *Kissing the Hag: The Dark Goddess and the Unacceptable Nature of Women* (UK: John Hunt Publishing, 2008).

41 Cassandra Eason, *The Modern-Day Druidess: Discover Ancient Wisdom, Prophetic Power and Healing Arts* (Kensington Publishing Corporation, 2004).

Women hold important roles in many of the current Neo-Pagan movements. (It should be remembered that surveys show a generally larger interest in Neo-Pagan religions among women than men.<sup>42</sup>) Various forms of Wicca stress the importance of the female element in their beliefs and practices. This emancipation in the Pagan world is strongly related to the emergence of what is generally referred to as the “Goddess movement,” ideas which placed the female deity at the center of beliefs and worship, as well as other schools of thought preaching the importance of women in Neo-Paganism.<sup>43</sup> These ideas may have also influenced the “feminization” of Druidry, especially the Neo-Pagan Druidry.

The issue of “feminine” aspects of Druidry is one of discussion subjects among the contemporary followers of Druidry<sup>44</sup>. As there are many voices within the Druidic diaspora, it is impossible to quote all of them, and personal statements on the subject, are, as well, numerous<sup>45</sup>. One of the interesting ideas is a postulate, that Druidry should abandon the gender discussion, as no longer relevant for contemporary spirituality, as expressed by Nimue Brown:

Being female is not my defining spiritual experience. Being human is not my defining spiritual identity, either. I like it when circles have dogs in them, when cows and sheep turn up to watch, or birds get involved. Being alive is not my defining spiritual identity, because I have a growing sense, of and affinity with the dead people who also show up sometimes. To be a Druid, is to be present. The rest is just detail.<sup>46</sup>.

We may imagine that it is only one of the voices within contemporary Druidry, but it is surely worth of attention, because it brings the idea of Druidry (especially the Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids interpretation), being the pan-religious spiritual way, to the pan-gender level.

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42 Helen A. Berger, Evan A. Leach, and Leigh S. Shaffer, *Voices from the Pagan Census: a National Survey of Witches and Neo-Pagans in the United States* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 27–28.

43 Margot Adler, *Drawing Down the Moon: Witches, Druids, Goddess-Worshippers, and Other Pagans in America* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 178–239.

44 There is also a terminological discussion in some druidic groups, on whether the term „Druidess” should be used, or it is sufficient to use the term “Druid” in relevance to both male and female adherents of Druidry. See: Jenny Butler, “Druidry in Contemporary Ireland”, in: *Modern Paganism in World Cultures: Comparative Perspectives*, ed. Michael Strmiska (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2005), 103.

45 See eg. *Aontacht. Women in Druidry*, 3/6, 2013; (available at: <http://www.druidicdawn.org/node/3184>, access: November 2014).

46 Nimue Brown, *Gender and Paganism*, (<https://druidlife.wordpress.com/2013/12/12/gender-and-paganism/>, access: November 2014).

## CONCLUSION

Mos adherents of modern Druidry believe that the ancient Druids were both male and female. This belief is probably based on the presence of Druidesses in culture and art, since historical accounts do not offer a clear answer. It seems that modern pop culture may have also popularized the image of the female Druid: the ever-revived Arthurian lore, in literature or television, speaks of many influential women, as do the novels of Marion Zimmer Bradley, especially “The Mists of Avalon” (1983) and its adaptation,<sup>47</sup> both of which are a kind of feminist retelling of the Arthurian legend. In the context of Druidry, the novel “The Forest House” (1994) by the same author is also noteworthy: the plot is loosely based on Bellini’s “Norma,” and the most important protagonists are priestesses. The heroine, Eilan, is a granddaughter of an Archdruid, and the founder of the sanctuary of Avalon, protected and shrouded by mist. In Bradley’s novels, it is the women who are the keepers of the ancient pagan mysticism, and it is because of their effort that the mystical tradition is not lost and forgotten in the times of cultural change.

On the subject of pop-cultural representation of Druids, it should perhaps be noted that female characters appear more and more frequently. In the British horror classic from 1973, “The Wicker Man,” which tells the story of a small “pagan” community and their practice of human sacrifice by live burning in a human-shaped wicker cage (reference to such a Celtic custom being described by Caesar). The spiritual leader of those “pagans” is the Lord Summerisle (Christopher Lee). An American remake of the film, made in 2006, gives the audience a Sister Summerisle (Ellen Burstyn), and her costume and makeup suggest a Wiccan or Druid priestess. A new, and quite interesting, approach to female Druids emerges in pop-culture from the area of role playing and video games: the image of a Druid as a militant defender of nature, a leather-clad shaman accompanied by animals, that is very popular in RPG and video games (and indeed seems currently more popular than the white robed Panoramix sage) definitely includes female Druids. A search of the term “Druid” in Google images will supply mostly these kind of representations, consistent with Druid portrayal in role playing and video games, and the results will include many female characters, not much different from the male ones. The second edition of the manual for the “Dungeons & Dragons” roleplaying game, while listing possible character professions, illustrates the Druid class with a picture of a man, but the third and fourth edition presents women – fighters for the cause of nature.<sup>48</sup> One can also

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47 Tanice G. Foltz, „The Commodification of Witchcraft”, in: *Witchcraft and Magic: Contemporary North America*, ed. Helen A. Berger (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 151.

48 Jeremy Crawford, Mike Mearls and James Wyatt, *Dungeons & Dragons Player’s Handbook 2: Primal, Arcane and Divine Heroes* (Newport: Wizards of the Coast, 2009), 82.

become a Druid (or a Druidess) in many computer games, especially those associated with the RPG genre. The Druid/ess is usually portrayed as a spell-casting character, associated with nature magic, often professing both battle spells and an ability to heal the wounded, like in World of Warcraft: “Male and female players liked the versatility of this class, with its ability to heal and fight (...) Rosa [a game player] reflected on the larger context of druids and why she liked them: “[They were] more appreciative of women and mother nature and letting everyone be who they are.”<sup>49</sup>.

Images of Druids and Druidesses found in modern pop culture surely speak to the imagination, and they can also inspire both active and potential sympathizers of Druidry.<sup>50</sup> Even though Druidry – compared to Wicca, for example – is more popular among men than among women (possibly because of the movement’s masculinized history and the traditional image of Druids), the importance and influence of women in various Druidic groups has increased considerably over the last few years, and in the future, their voice will surely “thunder from the Druidic temple” like the powerful soprano of Maria Callas.

## SUMMARY

The ample cultural representation of Druids is dominated by the image of Druids as an elderly, white-clad sage; an image that references the Antique sources which describe Druids as mages, philosophers, the enlightened barbarians. Ancient sources also mention female Druids and priestesses of the Celtic tribes. Druidesses appear in literature, art and opera, as well as in the beliefs of modern adherents of Druidry. This article examines chosen gender aspects involved in the formation of the Druidic myth and changes thereof, beginning with Antique accounts, through the cultural reception of the Druidess myth, and ending with the role of women in modern religious movements related to Druidry.

## KEYWORDS

Druids, Druidesses, Gender in Druidry, Contemporary Druidry

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49 Nicholas Di Giuseppe, Bonnie Nardi, “Real Genders Choose Fantasy Characters: Class Choice in the World of Warcraft”, *First Monday. Peer-reviewed Journal on the Internet*, 2007, 12, 5-7 (<http://firstmonday.org/article/view/1831/1715>, access November 2014)

50 Adam Anczyk, *The Golden Sickle: An Introduction to Contemporary Druidry* (Katowice: Sacrum Publishing, 2014, manuscript, in print, 2014), 243.

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