

Bard Mythologies

Myths of the Civil War

July 11th to 19th 2020



Some of the participants on the Summer School from a Zoom Screen grab



Table of Contents

Battle of Maga Lena – Part 2	5
3) Briefing the Provinces: Task and Approach.....	9
4) When we stop telling stories – Personal Narratives and the healing power of Myth..	12
Comments and other Civil War Stories.....	16
6) Key Insights – what are the key learnings and Insights	22
7) The Voting – Democracy and its Effects	28
8) Feedback to Bard Summer School 2020	30
9) Conclusion – Some Final Comments.....	33

1) Summary of the Myth

Battle of Maga Lena – Part 1

In the Mythic History of Ireland, the Battle of Maga Lena is about a battle between the High King, Conn Céadchathach and Éoghan Mór, the King of Munster. It takes place some time after the defeat of the Goddess Culture of the Tuatha de Danann by the Sons of Mil at the Battle of Tailtiu. The outcome of that Battle is that the Tuatha are dispatched underground. As will be seen in the Maga Lena myth, these people of the other world in spite of their banishment, are still ever present and at times in a hostile form.

As we will see both protagonists in this story have their future told to them, as we will see. In the case of Conn this is during his otherworld journey. Here Lugh tells him of seven years of plenty and seven years without, nine years of peace and fifteen of truce. In Éoghan's case it is his father, Mogh Nuad's wife. This is Sioda, who has a dream of seven milk filled cows followed by seven giant and terrible cows. When their druid interprets the dream, it seems the same as Lugh's prediction. It is this prediction that Mogh Nuad decides to turn to his advantage. For seven years he hoards all the food he can get his hands on which puts him into a position to have a means of feeding the people of Munster. He agrees to feed them on condition that the two kings of Munster, Conaire and Mac Niad are banished. Éoghan reluctantly is appointed King of Munster in their stead by his father.

The two banished Munster Kings leave the province. They then protest their innocence to the High King, Conn who forms an alliance with them and offers them his daughters in marriage. This infuriates Mogh Nuad such that he decides to fight. In the ensuing battle Goll Mac Morna meets Mogh Nuad in battle and kills him.

A peace is then declared but Éoghan, who was an unwilling entrant into the war is now fully engaged. He is furious at the killing of his father and feels the desire for revenge. Battle is joined again and it is brutal. Just as Éoghan is about to tackle Goll, his father's killer, he is pulled away by

an otherworld woman, Eadoinn. She takes him to her magical island for nine days, of otherworld time (years in normal time). As he leaves, Eadoinn gives him three blessings: where to seek allies, a sword by which he can defeat any foe and one she will tell him at a later date.

The drums of war start beating again, albeit after a further fifteen years of truce (as predicted). Conn summons armies from Connacht, Ulster and from Leinster. The Leinster men are tired of paying an unjust levy. Éoghan, meanwhile, marches North to make himself High King.

As the two sides line up, Eadoinn gives Éoghan her final blessing. This is to shroud his armies in a mist. In Tara, Conn finds himself besieged and trapped. He knows defeat is certain but tricks Éoghan by lighting three times the amount of fires to deceive Éoghan as to the size of his forces.

Rather than fight the two men decide on another truce and Ireland is divided in a line running from Dublin to Galway Bay. Conn's half is in the North, Leth Cuinn and Éoghan's in the South, Leth Moga.

From this agreement there followed fifteen years of an uneasy truce.

[Battle of Maga Lena – Part 2](#)

One of the details of the division of Ireland between North (Conn's half) and South (Éoghan's half) was that both Galway and Dublin's port fell under the rule of Conn. This was to prove vital!

During the fifteen years truce, Éoghan had grown increasingly bitter. He longed for revenge. Because of these emotions he was not ruling with wisdom and as a result the lands were growing poor and barren, even at the King's table!

On a tour of his holdings he came across a sight that infuriated him. It was the sight of a bustling Dublin port, just North of the border. Éoghan was clear who was benefiting here and demanded an audience with the King. He demanded possession of the busy port claiming their deal was unfair. Conn's response was that goods can't be divided as land can. Éoghan immediately called an end to the truce and declared war again. It was the excuse he wanted!

Both sides regathered their forces and met on the hill of Maga Lena, where their fates were to be decided. Again, Éoghan had superior forces and knew it. He sent Conn an offer. Either I will kill all your warriors and their families and burn Tara to the ground or you and your kin are to leave Ireland.

Conn reluctantly agreed and sent his two foster brothers to deliver the message. Eoghan was delighted. He was now to be High King and told his men to feast and drink. But he then demanded fealty from Conn's messengers as he was to now be High King. When they refused, he dragged them up a high hill and cut off their heads! A gesture sure to meet a strong response. It was breaking a code protecting these ambassadors.

At this outrage Conn now decided to fight. No peace now!

Éoghan and his men meanwhile continue with the merriment. As they do the three-sister goddess, Eriu, Banba and Fodla arrive to tell Éoghan that he is now cursed. He rebukes them. They then visit Conn and tell him to attack at first light while the opposition are asleep and hungover. Conn refuses, saying this is dishonourable but Eriu says it is worse to let a man like Éoghan become High King. This is a time to take a stand.

So the battle was joined at dawn. After much bloodshed, in the end it came down to a brutal battle between firstly Goll and Éoghan, and then Conn and Eoghan trading blow for blow. The blows were unsparing and brutal.

It does, as the Goddess foretold, end with Conn cutting off Éoghan's head.

The wounded Conn and Goll just about manage to stay alive and are healed. And Conn becomes high King again. But it is an uneasy peace. Some say Conn's actions were dishonourable and this would haunt him. Ireland was united once more. But there was still a division within hearts and minds that could not be healed.

Some say Ireland was never whole again!

Note: a big reach out to Emmet Driver, the teller. But not only that, he discovered the text, and then did a super job making it accessible. The original translation by Eugene Curry is hard work from a storyteller's

perspective. It's great we have it, and Emmet did a lot of work for his two tellings. Thanks Emmet.

2) The Immediate Thoughts of Participants after the Story

Immediately following the telling of the Myth of the Battle of Maga Lena, the participants were split into break out groups to discuss each telling. They then reassembled in the bigger group. They were organised into five provinces. They were given a brief to discuss the story and what came to mind as a result and what their reactions might be. The key points raised were:

5. Holding the Common Ground

A number of groups raised the matter of how difficult it is to hold the "common ground". It was as if that once the culture moves towards war, especially civil war, the one thing that disappears is this shared space. In fact, rapidly, a situation emerges where you are either on one side or another – there is no longer any meeting place. In the myths this was "the Fifth Province", Tara and Uisneach. And as we saw in the telling, Tara was abandoned. It was threatened. It was this world view and ideology that had been established by the Tuatha de Danann.

6. The Importance of the Healer

What was clear is that a culture can be collectively wounded. And in that regard what is important is a healing process. In the myths this is the archetype of the healer, an archetype little in evidence in the Maga Lena story. For some this is connected to the idea of 'magic' as a restorative function. The question was raised, did the displacement of the Tuatha de Danann (the Battle of Tailtiu) mean they were suppressed or simply not listened to? Is this energy still in our psyche? How also are we to view the otherworld in the myth? Is this the unconscious or is it a parallel world, is it the imagination?

7. The nature of the Warrior

The point was made that one of the characteristics of the warrior archetype is they are good at fighting, have mastery of weapons, have a ruthlessness and willingness to kill. This then does not naturally mean an ability to lead. But the warrior archetype and energy was not in the ascendancy.

8. What is the point of it all?

The collective feeling at the end of the telling was that there was a sense of chaos and no real conclusion. This left a strong feeling of what was the point of it all? Why go through all of this? There was an outcome, but also a very bitter taste in the mouth.

In spite of the apparent conclusion of the fighting all that we are left with is an unstable outcome. And along the way, it is ordinary people who have suffered. The answer to the question, was it worth it or for many participants a resounding 'no'.

9. The Role of the Goddess

At the end of the Maga Lena story the three goddesses of Ireland do intervene. And they do so in both camps They tell Conn that he is to attack at dawn. It is clear and Conn is clear that this is a dishonourable action. However, they, the Goddesses are also clear that in a situation where we have two bad options, they are going to make a choice and advise on a direction. Goddesses, it seems have a pragmatic side! And realistically we had reached a situation where there was no ideal outcome from the situation, a civil war. They pushed for a partial closure.

What was articulated is that Conn gave up 'honour' (central to the warrior code) for 'expediency'. It was mentioned what was the status of the goddesses. This interestingly was exactly the dilemma in the

Irish Civil War many centuries later. Collins decided on an expedient response. DeValera was more driven by honour or 'righteousness'. Had the culture in the myth moved away from the goddess culture? How are we to view their status?

3) Briefing the Provinces: Task and Approach

A) Task

After the initial reflection on the Myth Telling, the participants were split into five groups and given the instruction that they had a week to put together a presentation as to what would be their "Vision" for a way forward for Ireland following this unsatisfactory outcome from the Civil War, that was the Battle of Maga Lena.

B) Approach: Get the Feelings Right

They were given an input from Sandy using insights from the world of politics, neuroscience and branding. This was built around a theme which is the 'emotional basis of political decision making'. At the core of the presentation was two short maxims:

"People feel before they think"

and

"You can't change feelings with facts"

A distinction was made between two forms of persuasion, blue and red rhetoric. Blue puts a series of facts together that reach a logical conclusion. Red rhetoric speaks to people's fears and hopes through story and myth.

The participants were encouraged to reflect on how they were going to seek to influence the other participants in a week's time. The implications, of course, was to focus on the importance of getting the 'red rhetoric' right first. The conventional focus of fact and logic, policy and content was to follow what should be a story or image designed to shape emotion.

	BLUE RHETORIC	RED RHETORIC
Nature	Argument	Enchantment
Means	Reason/Logic	Story/Symbol
History	Greece (post 5 th BCE) & Rome	Pre Socratic Greece Archaic Ireland
Founding Source	Plato	Homer
Discipline	Behaviour Science	Cultural Anthropology
Style	Detached	Involved
Viewer	Observes	Immerses
Archetype	Judge	Bard
Thinkers	Augustine, Descartes	Vico, Burke, Joyce
Advertising	Sell, Hard Sell	Create Longing

It was pointed out how the 45th President of the United States was a master of red rhetoric and had used five cultural myths of the country in his quest to get elected in 2016. The group were invited to look at the four 'Myth of Trump' videos covering how he operated.

Five US Myths that helped Trump get elected



THE OVERALL TASK

In the context of the above briefing the task for each province was to put forward to the other Provinces a Vision and a Candidate for Ireland going forward. The time was one year after the death of Conn and there was no High King. The focus was to be on ensuring that those forces and events that led to the Civil War were not repeated.

At the same time it was suggested that it might be valuable to bear in mind the “emotional basis of political decision making” and to consider using some of the skills of “red rhetoric”.

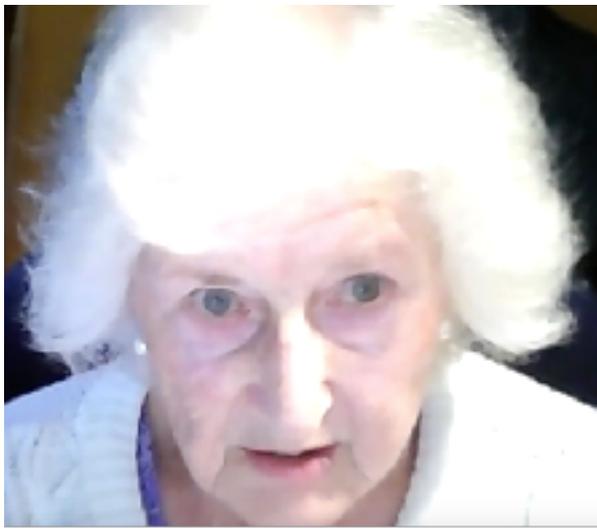
4) When we stop telling stories – Personal Narratives and the healing power of Myth

One of the most powerful moments during the Summer School was the personal narrative of one of the participants, Mairead McGrath. She told of her parents and grand-parents involvement in the Civil War of 1922 – 1923 and the War of Independence. One of the most poignant aspects of Mairead's telling was that for most of her life this was a story that outside the family could not be told, was not told. It is, it seems, that the reality of Civil War was so awful, so tragic and bitter that as humans we cease one of our most basic qualities "we stop telling stories". Mairead as a young girl was told not to speak of these matters outside the family.

It is worth reflecting on what this means, and what are the consequences. The fact that we stop telling does not mean that the story is not there. It is just 'buried'. But surely what this means there is no movement, no learning and vitally, no healing.

What Mairead told us was that we were looking at myth and that it was very useful and had been very useful to her. It had enabled to reconnect with this 'painful' part of her past. This, as she said, was invaluable. Her actual story was concrete. She recounted that she was born sixteen years after the Civil War and that both of her parents had been involved in both the Civil War and the War of Independence. Her father had been jailed in that war with the British. Her mother jailed during the Civil War. In this context she shared that she did not know whether to do the Summer School. She felt it could be very painful. Despite this she decided she had to sign up.

Halfway through the Summer School, in a large group session, Mairead recounted the story which was about the actuality of Civil War in the context of her family. Her father, she told us, was on the Pro Treaty side of Griffith/



Collins who had led the Irish Delegation that negotiated with the British to produce the 1921 Anglo Irish Treaty. That negotiating team included the charismatic Michael Collins and led to the creation of the Irish Free State, but not as a Republic. Griffith was the President of Dail Eireann from January 1922 to his death on 12th August 1922.

Mairead's mother was on the Anti-Treaty side, though not a supporter of Eamon De Valera, their political leader. Dev had not been a participant in the negotiations in London. This side saw the Treaty as a betrayal of the Irish Republic which had been proclaimed during the Easter Rising of 1916. This, of course, was the failed rebellion against the British which led to the execution of many of the leaders.

It is important to remember that both the Pro and Anti Treaty sides had been members of the Irish Republican Army (Old IRA) during the War of Independence. They had risked their lives in the War. So the split was very sad, painful and bitter. One distinguished commentator, Professor Joe Lee described it as the ruthlessness of necessity (Griffith/Collins) meeting the ruthlessness of righteousness (DeValera).

Mairead told us she remembered, decades later, the bitterness there was in the society as a result of the Civil War. She then shared what had happened to her mother's family.

The house they lived in in Ranelagh, the South Side of Dublin, had been bought in 1911. But during the Civil War, it was raided in the middle of the night by the Free State Soldiers. The family were in bed, were told

to get up, they were then put out on the street. Soldiers then broke every pane of glass in the house, the door of the dining room had visible signs of the hatchets they used. The signs were there throughout her childhood. They broke the stairway such that the family had to use orange boxes to get upstairs. They broke the piano and all of the dishes that were in the kitchen. They poured flour, sugar and anything like that out on the floor. The house was gutted.

While everyone on the street was awake because of the commotion, all the doors of the neighbours stayed shut. That is except for two elderly spinsters who took Mairead's mother's family in for the night. And one of the soldiers ran up, the road with her mother's new bicycle, saying, 'here take this'.

I was warned, Mairead told us, as a child, never to speak about the politics outside the hall door, never to speak about anything that her parents talked about. That, she said, was the reality and the heritage of the Civil War. The absolute tragedy, she said, was that people who had fought together for the Independence of the country were now killing each other. Brothers in the same family and fathers and sons in the one family were now enemies.

But then, some years after the Civil War finished the story was to take a fortunate turn! Mairead's mother and father were to meet at a Republican Ceili. The relationship developed and it came time for Mairead's mother to meet the family. There on the wall were photos of free state soldiers. When she asked who they were, only to be told, 'they are my brothers"! This was the army that had destroyed her house.

In all the time they had courted, this crucial detail had not come out. Love had transcended the recent history, the bitterness and pain! In spite of the background the relationship continued. The two 'opponents' married and Mairead was the result.

While the marriage was a success the experiences of the Civil War were to leave a legacy in the family. And, in the case of Mairead she told us it

felt like she had been carrying a weight on her shoulders all of her life. There were stories she had heard but always a sense of stories not told.

What Mairead then shared was her experience of attending the Summer School. On the first two, 2 hour Zoom sessions on Saturday and Sunday, the Bard Team, Emmet, had told the Battle of Magh Lena story. The participants were then broken out into small groups to discuss before we returned to the full group. Mairead had anticipated the event was going to be painful. But instead shared that at the end of the Sunday that she had felt a weight lifting from her shoulders that she had carried for so long.

At this stage she had not shared her story. That was to be on the Wednesday. It was not anything specific. There was no logical link. The specific subject of the Civil War, had not been discussed. The Magh Lena story was 'mythic history'. Yet the effect was tangible. It was a 'release', a weight gone.

What then happened was that on the Wednesday evening Bard Event, Mairead felt comfortable enough to tell a story that had not been told, to a large group. The comment made was "I have found my voice" and that the Bard School was 'much more than the Myths of the Civil War though they were hugely important and brought their own healing'. Mairead shared that it 'opened my eyes to the possibility of the pain of the Civil War being healed' and 'that would be wonderful. And I think in time, 100 years later, is right.

Needless to say, the other participants were very moved by this story. 'It's wonderful Mairead for you to people it with the suffering and the silence that I grew up with the hatred and the enmity'.

'thank you, Mairead, that was so beautiful'.

Comments and other Civil War Stories

There were other Civil War stories and observations that have been shared but on a private basis and some of these might be told as part of the Bard Podcast Series. What we have learned is the 'stories that are not told' phenomenon with the awfulness of war. We also saw during the Summer School the length of time these stories are carried.

One other participant highlighted the role the third party, the British had played in the Civil War. During the siege of the Four Courts, Lloyd George had threatened total annihilation if they didn't accept the words of the treaty there and then. In the time of the siege of the Republican Anti Treaty held Four Courts, Michael Collins held out the possibility of a negotiated conclusion, the British forced his hand and said, if you don't do it, we will. If Collins and his people had been given more time to negotiate, the Civil War might not have happened, it was suggested. There was, it inspired a level of guilt and shame around this incident and indeed the Civil War as a whole.

Sandy Dunlop shared the experience of growing up in Post Independence India where a very painful period of conflict and division took place between Hindu and Muslim who had lived together peacefully during their fight for Independence. His father, he recounted, had had to step over mutilated bodies on the way into work. And the subsequent riots years later between the two sides would flare up in awful community violence. Do Civil Wars invariably follow Independence? And what role did the parting coloniser potentially play in that War?

In terms of Stories that cannot be told, Sandy told how his father had never shared any stories of the war in the North African Desert, except once after a few drinks! It is as if some experiences are too painful to be told. He had been in Montgomerie's army fighting the Germans. This obviously was not a 'Civil War' but it was the same 'stories not told' phenomenon. And, perhaps if not told, no resolution, no healing.

A number of other stories were shared, some privately, some in small groups, of involvements in executions and bombings, of the innocent, the bystander and the actively engaged. So what next?

We will consider the role of 'storytelling' and 'myth telling' and what roles Bard could play. Should we offer a space for the hidden buried stories to be told?

5) The Provincial Visions – Munster, Leinster, Connacht, Ulster, Centre

Following on from the brief and the core task for participants in the Summer School each one of the Provinces had ten minutes to present their Vision and Proposals to the Participants that they had been working on during the week. This is the highlight of the group's presentations.

The Centre

The Druidess of the Centre, Brid Ni Laraig, came in first with an evocative call for healing and the peace of the Goddess – a warrior culture had emerged following the defeat of the Tuatha De Danann at the Battle of Tailtiu. A number of symbols were offered: a 'beautiful chalice' made from the swords of battle, Eriu's presentation of a branch of ash bearing apples, acorns, rowanberries, fruit of the hawthorn. What was suggested was a gathering of the people at Tara for Bealtaine where the Goddess wisdom would be drawn upon.

Leinster

At the core of the Leinster piece was an evocation of a setting, a forest and a gathering around a fire at mid-Summer, the time of harvest and a feast, the feast of Lughnasa. On offer was all the abundance of nature, mead, ale, whiskey, venison, salmon, honey. Important was a recognition of the suffering that has come from the division but also a remembering of past times of abundance and feasting. The warrior was importantly recognised as fighting for the land and people as well as the quality and values of the King. The role of the otherworld (unconscious) was highlighted with an encounter with Manannan to play a role in proceedings.

Specific recognition was given to how new big changes caused by technology (iron) or new political arrangements could cause problems and harden men's hearts causing division. The proposal was to create a vision that looked beyond divisions. An old hag visited sharing a dream which operated as a symbol of war but also music and healing. The

triple spiral was also suggested as a reminder of the cycles of life death and rebirth.

Ulster

There were a number of important themes in the Ulster Presentation. They acknowledged their identity as a place of battle and war but reframed it as two very interesting ways. Firstly they, as a province, understood war which put them in a good place to enable peace. Secondly the red mist which typically meant rage, battle and anger, (CuChulain's *ristradh*), could also mean passion and compassion. Acknowledging how others saw them was very authentic and effective. They took what could have been negative and reframed these perceptions.

Their Ulster presentation acknowledged the motivation of Civil War being a 'darkening of spirit' and a bid for power that can corrupt with a desire to 'lord it over others'. This felt like a powerful analysis and insight.

The Ulster way forward was inspired by Triple Spiral Study for wellbeing, courage and hope; it meant using new technology (iron) less for weapons of war and more for generative uses (a plough shoe); it suggests farmers markets as a gathering of community to share the produce of earth and sea, but also a market for ideas; and as well as recognition of the role of the other world (unconscious). Finally and centrally important was the role of rituals and place, specifically "uisneach" a meeting place for all, to heal and inspire.

Connacht

This province started with O'Caerbhall Warrior of Connacht began by establishing that they, no more and no less than anyone else, had been through great pain and hardship. It was a powerful recognition of where the country was. Their solution was extremely simple, (though often very difficult to implement). It was about 'sitting together, talking and importantly listening to each other'. Hearing every side, their pain,

suffering and then hope was absolutely vital before any healing was possible.

The warrior ended with a slogan, as it were, Ni Neart go Cur le Cheile (there is no strength without unity). Every speaker from the province finished their few words with the chant. It became like a mantra and the Irish words had a powerful effect. So did the repetition.

Brid O'Maillie, the Healer evoked the image of the salmon thrashing upstream as if to a spawning ground, reminded everyone of the difficulty of the task, of simple listening.

Aisling MacCaim the Druid spoke of uniting anam, the souls, and the other world. Oisín O'Bronáin the Brehon spoke of deep listening and the laws to reach harmony and Saoirse Ní Cassidhe the Bard spoke to storytelling listening into who we truly are.



We returned to the quiet authority of the warrior who, courting the instruction suggest we needed not a King or Queen but a Council at which all the provinces would meet at Lughnasa in Connacht (well Clare Island). Behind the speaker was a powerful image of the four provinces united by a circle. It was very striking and seemed to stick in people's minds, along with the final chant, Ni Neart go Cur le Cheile.

Munster

The Munster offering was woven through with song from Ciara Bard (and warrior). Initially there was an acknowledgement of the devastation wrought by the Civil War but a powerful evocation to sweep it away along with the form of leadership, and structures of mind that led to the outcome.

Early on the Munster Fíli highlighted the importance of apology for past wrongs as a precursor to any forward movement. Niamh, the Healer

went back in Mythic history to the harm done by the Tuatha De Danann in the needless murder of Ith from Spain. It was this murder, and abuse of hospitality that led to the Battle of Tailtiu at which the Tuatha were defeated. Sioda, the Queen also apologised for the mayhem wrought by her husband and sons in the context of the Battle of Magh Lena.

Moving on Sioda also stressed the forms of leadership, the attitudes and cast of mind that needed to be changed to ensure such a battle on each other and the land was a thing of the past. The abuse of power, autocratic leadership, weak kings were mentioned here.

Fintan, representing the farmers, introduced the idea of a Peace Corp of farms and a series of innovative approaches to farming and the land. The group also involved the idea of a ripple that becomes a stream, becomes a mighty current there was it seemed unity at the small beginnings of big thoughts.

Ashling, the Craftsperson Jeweller evoked, again the idea of the council centred around a sacred tree (in Norse myth this is Yggdrasil). The tree had five branches each associated with a symbol and quality.

West	Wisdom	Owl
North	Death/War	Crow
East	Abundance	Pheasant
South	Song	Blackbird
Centre	Grace/Love	Two
Swans		



This is six birds perched on a tree of unity. It was when they gathered that the meeting could begin. This was their gift and offering.

The Munster folk finished with a toast from Daithi, the Innkeeper, a toast to unite.

Centre (Again)

The dominant mythology evoked by the centre was that of the Goddess (In Ireland's mythic history the Tuatha had been defeated and consigned underground). The Goddess culture was resurrected here.



Again, at the core of this presentation was not a King but a Council and a gathering and an attitude to the world. Specifically, we were Stewards not Masters (not Genesis Chapter, dominion over). Also outlined were a time, Bealtaine and a Ritual, a Journey to Tara. The meeting was to begin at Uisneach before a Journey to Tara.

The gathering would involve seven from each province making thirty-five. There were kings but largely as figureheads. It seemed their role would be facilitative and symbolic.

The Theme was that this was the

- Way of the Goddess
- Way of the Centre

The Bard offered the Sacred Cup, fashioned from the sword of Éoghan, from this we would all drink.

6) Key Insights – what are the key learnings and Insights

There were a number of themes and powerful insights that have emerged from the Myth of the Civil War Summer School:

1. The Story not Told

One of the recurring themes was that the overall experience of Civil Wars are so painful and tragic that people who have lived through such as time, do not want to talk about what happened. What this means is a whole area of shared cultural experience becomes a taboo subject, that which cannot be spoken. Given that humans are storytelling animals this suppression of story is remarkable.

One of the consequences of this is that the emotions, be they anger, hurt, fear, shame, humiliation, guilt, do not go away, do not get dealt with. And surely then the culture remains stuck, unable to move on, and the feelings then potentially get acted out in other ways, probably inappropriate. They are internalised, perhaps in harmful ways both physical and emotional.

2. The Effect of the Telling

Judging by a small sample (Mairead's story), it seems that even the effect of entering the troubled Civil War albeit at one removed via myth telling in an oral collective context had a healing effect. "It felt like something I had been carrying all my life lifted", was what Mairead said.

What we are considering in the Bard is collecting further oral stories of the Civil War and its effect across the generations.

3. The Statement of Where we Are

One of the most effective elements of the Province presentations was the articulation of deeply held feelings that were collectively held. If there are intense emotions, to have them recognised and stated was very important... and appreciated. It might be tempting to want to move on but the few moments to state the shared feelings about the mayhem and disruption of a Civil War was very important. Positive thinking doesn't work if pain, deeply felt, is not acknowledged.

4. The Importance of Apology and Forgiveness

Some of the groups explicitly took responsibility for their role in past injury caused. For example, the Munster group went back into the mythic history to acknowledge the mistake of the Tuatha De Danann in killing Ith from Spain. It was this that led to the arrival of Amerghin and the Sons of Mil and their defeat at the Battle of Tailtiu. Siodha, the Munster Queen also apologised for her husband and sons' actions in relation to the Civil War.

The act of taking responsibility and acknowledging hurt caused was an important step in a healing process. But the Act of Forgiveness on the other side was also a significant moment.

5. The Centrality of the "Gathering"

There was almost no focus on the leader, whether King or Queen in the work and recommendations of the Provinces. Rather the attention was put on the type of gathering, councils, assemblies and the nature of that event.

Within these gatherings, ideas such as the "wise", meeting as equals, rotating leadership, king in a symbolic rather than authoritative role, gender balanced, were proposed. In addition, including diversity and bringing in guilds were mentioned.

6. The Importance of Listening

Since the Greeks one of the core skills of a leader has been speaking. Training in rhetoric as a core competence was stressed. The importance of oratory, the ability to influence others through argument.

The frequent theme here stressed by the provinces was that of listening, listening deeply. This orientation obviously related to listening to the 'other', the 'enemy', but it seemed to have a wider meaning which included listening to the land and to yourself. And listening to history. Inner listening was also proposed.

7. The Role of Symbols

Every group had recourse to symbols and images as playing a critical role in their presentations. These often were symbols drawn from the natural world but the more abstract symbol of the Connacht group was particularly effective and memorable. (See front page of this memo).

What was evident is that a well-chosen symbol can have a powerful communicative effect and can capture complex thoughts in an accessible way. The Munster group's symbol of five branches and birds come to mind as one particularly effective use of symbol.

Another dynamic image of a trickle becomes a stream becoming a current also captured the dynamic effect of ideas.

8. The Use of Rhythm, Reputation, Ritual

The successful presentation of Connacht made use of repetition in the slogan. The group also used the Warrior (Peter) as a connecting thread between input with his reassuring tone and the use of the slogan. This had the feel of a ritual. The group also had a simple unifying idea. It was, they suggested, not about Kings or Queens, but rather a Council of all the Provinces to meet each season. With the chant, repeated by all the presenters "Ni neart go cur le chèile, there is no strength without unity, this presentation created the sense of ritual. It was very memorable in many ways.

9. The Power of "Red Rhetoric"

A number of comments were made that the Connacht group had made best use of 'red rhetoric' which is built around the recognition that 'people feel before they think'. This means connecting at an emotional level first is an absolute must.

In conjunction with this, the groups who did not win the vote felt they had not been able to do justice to their thinking and that overall, a less than optimum decision had been made collectively by the group. The democratic processes as in 'first past the post' left many feeling much had to be lost!

10. We've stolen your Cattle!

Though it was said somewhat tongue in cheek, the announcement from the Ulster Team (Tom) that they had sent their Red Branch Knights out to steal all the cattle of other provinces. They were, it seemed, somewhat sceptical of the perhaps 'soft' discussion of goddess and harmony etc. Ulster were articulating a vital voice. In short, there might be thieves/raiders about. Are you being naïve in these ideas of feasts and balance was inherent in the suggestion?

11. Balance not Control

This may be a point that has wider implications that a situation of a Civil War there but there was recurring thinking that focused on the matter of the centre's key role being balance rather than consolidation and control. This idea is of course central to the Mythology of the Fifth Province. An old Irish tale, Airne Fingein contains a woman's prophecy concerning Conn Céadchathach "their son (Conn) will obtain Ireland in one lot, and takes it from its fifths". * These presentations were all about a return to the Ireland of the Fifths.

12. Distributed Power over Hierarchy

Another recurring theme was that of reimagining power (and kingship). Essentially there are other concepts of exercising power that need to be explored. This includes distributed power as a contrast to hierarchical thinking. And what is the role of Kingship in such a distributed power system.

It was felt that change would have to come from the 'bottom up'. In many cases it is the actions of people at the top that has caused the 'war' but it is people at the 'bottom' experience most of the pain. But change can start at every level and bottom up was preferred.

The importance of taking responsibility linked with 'levels' meant that action at wherever we find ourselves is important. In this regard deep listening is important at a tribal, country, provincial and national and international level. At all levels a 'collective conversation' was stressed.

* Quoted in Conn Céadchathach and "The Image of Ideal Kingship in Early Medieval Ireland" - Gregory Bondarenko

7) The Voting – Democracy and its Effects

As organizers we introduced a so called 'Democratic Vote' in which participants were to vote for their preferred way forward but could not vote for their own province.

Connacht won! On review it was agreed they had done the best job in applying the tools of red rhetoric! This meant symbols, repetition of epithets, a feeling of ritual etc.

But it also meant there were four provinces that did not win! Democratic voting such as was used throws up winners and losers. It was a first past the post vote. So, what did that leave participants feeling:

- Some did not vote, feeling they did not want to be part of that process
- There was a palpable feeling of disappointment among some teams who 'lost'!
- It felt that the vote was somehow not in sync with either the group work or the presentations or the school itself
- That 'richness' and good thinking was lost from the non-winners.

Listening again to all the presentations, I (Sandy) was left feeling that each province had some powerful and unique thoughts and perspectives. At the same time there was also a lot of common ground. Perhaps the old tribal ways could be used. This was mentioned by Brendan Tobin in a provincial session, though he was not able to be at all the events, apparently these thoughts were very helpful and played an important role in shaping the approach recommended. (N.B. Brendan is an expert of Legal Systems of Indigenous People and has written a book on the subject).

What is also clear is that the 'first past the post' voting system creates a climate of winners and losers. And the dangers of a feeling of pride (perhaps hubris) among the winners and a feeling of losing with associated feelings of shame. These feelings of shame, even humiliation are explored by Harvard Philosopher, Michael J Sandel in his recent book "The Tyranny of Merit" and offer an interesting explanation of the success of Trump in exploiting deeply felt cultural feelings of humiliation by those who feel they have lost out to globalization and are humiliated by the 'college' graduates. Intense emotions felt widely, have ongoing consequences!

8) Feedback to Bard Summer School 2020

Really get to know all the people in my province
Great Experience.

Some conflict in the group but there was good in that and it reflected the overall theme! Overall a very valuable experience.

How amazed at the energy was running through every single session
You've done an amazing job. I've been blown away by that.

I know how much really hard work has you by you guys. The generosity of all that is appreciated. Also helped in the understanding democracy and the world we live

Slightly pessimistic the way myth has been exploited by leaders.

It was amazing. However, I'm depressed after it. Taken optimism and it's gone. We need another session to get to a way forward. We need a better resolution.

Hugely healing experience. Everyone's presentations were amazing. Sitting and feeling the energy. It can take time to get the message. Thank you x

The whole Civil War thing is very unsettling. It made me feel extremely uncomfortable and it provided a feeling of responsibility to do something about it. I feel powerless. I don't feel represented.

I'd like to see my county back.

If we went back to old myths we would see the truth in there.

I wasn't looking forward to the topic but I found it powerful it has left me with a sense of personal responsibility, what can I do.

It was my first time to be involved. I absolutely loved it. I do love Politics so I deeply enjoyed all I did.

I feel I have been in Ireland but using zoom but I feel you are all real people we know each other and I've been in Ireland and it's been very rewarding. (Participant from France)

I found it very, very powerful. It will be percolating in my mind. I couldn't believe that the myths have relevance today. That just blows my mind. It did for me personally, I found my voice to speak.

I had a great time and meeting you all.

It was interesting to see how far and how deep we could go there were lots of seeds sown for ballads, for healing, for how we approach power. A lot of beauty came out. I learned a lot. It was a such a rich immersion.

I'd met so many wonderful people.

I'm sad thinking this is our last time together! Is there an online forum where we can continue this discussion onward? A blog? or Facebook page? or website forum?

Deep gratitude to all - IT HAS BEEN A PLEASURE! X

Huge thanks to all at Bard

Great to have met up with you allit has been a privilege!
It's been a privilege to be part of the team.

Thanks to everyone. It has been lovely to have been immersed in myth and magic amidst the conflict and these strange times we are living through thanks to everyone.

It has been such a rich and embodied experience for me. Thank you to my Ulster team for allowing the myth to really work us. Thank you too to

everyone who brought their passion and creativity and to the Bard team who held such a wonderful and inspiring space.

Wonderful, met such wonderful people! A Challenge to us all: how can we increase our diversity among our participants, which may bring in more diverse viewpoints from varied roots.

9) Conclusion – Some Final Comments

There seems to be complete agreement that the Summer School was a powerful, intense and worthwhile experience. In a way we were exploring an area where hatred and fears get acted out against your fellow country men and women and often in very violent ways. A Civil War is a time where there is shame and guilt at actions taken. It is so painful, and tragic that it can become a story that cannot be told (as we saw with Mairead's story). What we inherent in the Summer School was to choose to look again and to tell the hardly known story in Irish Myth, the Battle of Mag Lena, The Myth of the Civil War.

As recorded above the feedback was largely extremely positive. It had been a valuable experience. However, some feedback was that this was unfinished business. Some participants felt 'depressed' and 'powerless' with the current situation in the world and in politics. There was, it seemed much more needs to be done. And also, a number of participants felt a strong sense of needing to take responsibility.

So, in summary, we, the Bard plan to build these thoughts into the Autumn Series.

Through Nine Waves Immersion II
The Chosen and the Not Chosen

Where these themes can be picked up again through the Fianna Cycle and more depth in the Mythological Cycle Fionn begins the healing!

We also plan to carry on the Civil War Theme in a number of Podcasts going forward over the next few months.

Many thanks to the Participants who gave such a level of commitment, enthusiasm, openness and hard work. And finally, to the Bard team: Emma, Joni, Emmet, Chaobang and Cathal.

Bard Mythologies
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