

in The Wind

Seattle Storytellers Guild Events

- How to be a Real Character—A workshop with Norm Breke and Anne Rutherford March 6, 2016
- First Friday Story Swaps See page 3
- The Wonder Smith and His Son March 19th—The George Center
- Earth Day Storytelling April 24th
- Haller Lake Storytelling May 20th 7:30 P.M. at Haller Lake Community Center
- Folk Life Storytelling May 27-30
- Auntmama's Storycorner Last Thursdays at 7 p.m., at Madison Park Starbucks. See page 8

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Added Flyers:

- Alice—in-Wonderland A 1 Woman show with Anne Rutherford/
- How to be a Real Character—Workshop with Norm Breke and Anne Rutherford
- Folk Life Storytelling 2012

* Print these out *
* and share them *



AN EPIC EVENT

A company of Seattle Storytelling Guild tellers will share an epic length traditional Irish myth on Saturday, March 19th, 2016, from 7:00-10:00 pm, at The George Center for Community, 2212 NE 125th St, Seattle, WA 98125.

The Wonder Smith and His Son is a retelling of a wonderful Irish myth collected by Ella Young presented by sixteen storytellers and musicians.

Ella Young collected these stories throughout Ireland over nearly 20 years, and wove them in an epic tale of a master craftsman and his children, drawing the characters from Irish Mythology. What parts she could not find, she filled in – with writing echoing the lyrical and lovely language of their Irish origins. There is more about the Wonder Smith and Irish Myth in this issue of *In The Wind*.

This will be SSG's first step into "epic length group storytelling." Tellers include: Larry Hohm, Katherine Gee Perrone, Allison Cox, Barry McWilliams, Jane Valencia, Jill Johnson, Meg Lippert & Margaret Read MacDonald, Mary Gavan, Jeff Leinaweaver, Leslie Slape, Cathryn Fairlee, Samantha Desmond, Joy Ross. Musicians include Mary Dessen, Katherine Gee Perrone, and Jane Valencia. Judith Alexander is the Emcee.

Along with the telling will be occasional musical accompaniments of Harp, Psaltery, Penny Whistle, and Guitar. Allison Cox has organized this exciting event! You are invited to come for this memorable evening and bring your friends, we will have ample seating!

Suggested Donation: \$5 - members, \$8 - non-members, \$12 - families
For Info, contact: Allison Cox
allison@dancingleaves.com



Illustration by Boris Artzybasheff



MEETING THE WONDER-SMITH, PART 1:

The Seattle Storytellers Guild has an "Epic Storytelling Event" with sixteen tellers, and Musicians in March 2016.

Picture a white haired woman in her sixties in the purple robes of a Druid holding large audiences of students at UC Berkeley spellbound with heroic myths and sagas and tales of legendary creatures such as fairies and elves, and the benefits of talking to trees in the 1930's. This same woman moved in circles of artists and intellectuals, was a rebel during the Irish rebellions and finished her last years communing with nature's spirits on the West Coast of California.

Ella Young, the author of **The Wonder-Smith and His Son**, Ella Young had a life as interesting as the tales she published in her books.

Born in 1867 in Northern Ireland the oldest of six children; growing up her family moved to various places in Ireland before settling in Dublin. Attending nearby Alexandra College she was a protégé of the Irish Nationalist, George William Russell. She joined the Theosophical Society and had contact with intellectuals and artists interested in Spiritualism including W. B. Yeats, Padraic Pearse, Isabella Augusta (Lady Gregory), and Padraic Colum.

She got her B.A. in 1898 at the age of 31, and after her graduation, she became a teacher. She was deeply immersed in the study of Irish history, nationalism and the struggle for independence. During this period, she spent considerable time in the west of Ireland learning Gaelic, collecting fairy tales, tales of yore and studying the ways and customs of the people of the west. She published **Poems** in 1906, and wrote a number of children's books on Irish mythology including **The Coming of Lugh** (1909), **Celtic Wonder Tales** (1910) and **The Rose of Heaven**, a book of verse (1920).

She joined the activist Daughters of Ireland, a radical Irish nationalist organization, in 1900. They promoted Irish language, history, and culture - combating English influences - and would become the women's arm of the rebellion. While not directly a part of the hostilities, she hid and ran guns and ammunitions to Irish Volunteers during the Irish Republicans' struggles for an independent Ireland, including the failed 1916 Easter Rising, which ended with the execution of her close friend Padraic Pearse. The conflicts continued, but hopes were crushed by the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921, the partitioning of Ireland, and an oppressive Irish Free State. For a time she laid low in the west, where she continued collecting stories and myths. But it was time to leave Ireland.

Opportunity came as Ella Young, now 58, was invited to lecture on Irish Mythology in American universities and hired to fill the post of Celtic studies scholar at the University of California in Berkeley in 1924, and she immigrated to the United States in 1925 on a temporary visa. However Young was briefly detained at Ellis Island as a probable mental case when the authorities learned that she believed in the existence of fairies, elves, and pixies! The New York Times announced her arrival with the headline, "Ambassador from Elfland!" A wealthy patron and grandson of the 21st President interceded in her behalf.

Finally admitted, she lectured in New York and the East Coast, proceeded west by train, seeing the Grand Canyon and New Mexico, and continued on Berkeley. Her encyclopedic knowledge and enthusiasm for the subject of Celtic mythology attracted and influenced many of her friends and won her a wide audience among writers and artists in California. She also made trips to Taos, New Mexico where she had friendships with Photographer Ansel Adams and his wife, Georgia O'Keefe and other artists and writers.



It was at this time that she published **The Wonder-Smith and His Son** in 1925, and **The Tangle-Coated Horse and other Tales** in 1929, both were Newberry Honor Books. In the introduction to the **Wonder-Smith and His Son**, Ella said it took her twenty years to collect the various fragments of the myths of the *Gubbaun Soar* from Gaelic storytellers in thatched cottages and little villages in Ireland. **The Unicorn with Silver Shoes** was published in 1932 - a Celtic myth turned inside out.

In 1931, she went to Canada and sought to re-enter the United States, on a work visa with the intention of becoming an American Citizen. Again her application was held up for months resulting in a publicized fire-storm of letters to the State Department from friends and fellow academics and pointed questions to President Hoover.

Ella had a passionate love and reverence for the land of America. She regarded her new country as a "great tawny lioness," in contrast to Ireland, which she saw as a "white unicorn." Ella felt most at home in the wild and rugged beauty of the West Coast. She spent time as she could with the spirits of the land - to her a larger race than their Irish counterparts. She considered the rocky, wooded promontory of Point Lobos to be the center of psychic power for the entire Pacific Coast and she revived the old Celtic Mystery School at Mount Shasta in Northern California.

After her retirement, she moved to a little cottage close to the beach and dunes she loved in Oceano, California planting an exquisite garden on barren sandy soil. In the evenings she would fill the house with candlelight and hold court beside the hearth fire recounting magical stories with her friends, the Dunites, members of a Theosophical community living in the dunes. There she wrote a two volume Auto-Biography: **Flowering Dusk: Things Remembered Accurately and Inaccurately**. She never returned to Ireland. After her death, to cancer in 1956 at the age of 88, her ashes were scattered among the Redwoods north of the Napa Valley. A biography, **Ella Young Irish Mystic and Rebel**, written by Rose Murphy, was published in 2008.



Part 2 of Barry McWilliams' article will look at the Wonder-Smith Myth and its connections to Irish Mythology.

PART 2: THE WONDER SMITH AND IRISH MYTH

The Wonder Smith and His Son is a literary epic myth by Ella Young drawn from stories collected from cottages and fishermen in Ireland. While clearly a literary creation, it is told in wonderful poetic language with a Gaelic ring. Taking her main characters from Irish mythology, she has made them into simple folk with humor and shrewd kindness – telling a timeless story of family relationships amidst the challenges of life. Ella Young wrote the Wonder-Smith in 1927 as she left Ireland and its violent struggles for a new life in America. Where Irish myths glorified heroic fighters, she has composed an epic battle of wits instead.

Celtic myths survived in abundance in Ireland. But Elizabeth Cook in her book, *The Ordinary and the Fabulous*, says “Many modern readers, children and grownups alike, find them dull or ridiculous. The stories as they have actually been told are rarely poetic . . . unpromising material.” Another writer says “Irish mythology is endearingly clear as mud.”

There are reasons for this muddle of Irish myth. Unlike the mythologies of Rome and Greece and Egypt – Celtic myths were oral traditions passed down by druids and bards and tainted by Roman conquest until Middle Age Christian clerics with a bias against paganism recorded them. And the bulk of these, which became the tales of Arthur, or the Children of Lir, or Tristan and Isolt, were Welsh and British.

Irish mythologies left no temples and little art to interpret. Sacred places were natural features - groves of trees, bodies of water – in fact, every feature of the landscape was mythic. “*The Irish think of their history mythologically; and so too, of their geography.*” The pagan Celtic worldview had a “*belief in a time when the super-natural was natural, when the marvelous was normal.*”

Ireland was settled by stone age farmers who left megaliths and burial mound cairns which became sacred places and portals to the Underworld. Bronze age brought in metallurgy, the building of “Hill Forts” fortified with rings of ditches; and many “stone circles.” The Iron Age brought invaders that dominated Ireland and its earlier peoples, leaving us the great Irish sagas of the pre-Christian period.

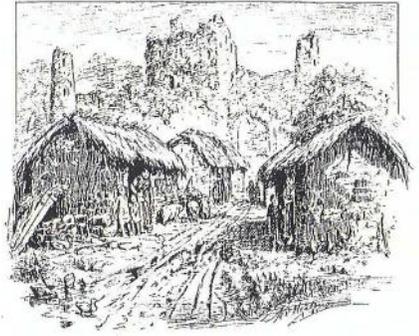
In mythic history, the first Irish perished in Noah's Flood. Later settlers were overcome by the *Fir Bolg*, who left Ireland and then returned, only to be defeated by the *Tuatha Dé Danann* – who came with magical powers – gods of fertility, water, battle, the sun, blacksmithing, craft-working, and the “other world” – playing out their dramas in the three principal ‘cycles’ of Irish tales and their warrior heroes: CuChulainn; Finn MacCool and his Fianna.

The *Tuatha De Dannan* struggled with the *Fomor*, a monstrous race ruled by a cyclops named Balor. The *Fir Bolg* and *Fomorian*s represented the harmful or destructive powers of nature, while the *Tuatha Dé Danann* represented the gods of growth and civilization. Defeated by the invading *Milesians* who became the Irish, the *Tuatha* withdrew into the underworld where they still feast. Eventually that race of gods seems to have declined into the leprechauns and fairies of later Irish folk lore.



This is the background of Celtic Irish Myth from which Ella Young drew her tales. There are creatures of Irish Celtic Mythology – a *Pooka*, a shape shifting water spirit, and the *Piast* - a Sea Serpent, drawn fold on fold from the deep, writhing and glittering – every scale like a wave. But there are also creatures from other traditions, Norse, and *Djinns* of Arabia.

The epic of the Wonder Smith begins with the Gubbaun Saor receiving his tools and his talents as a smith, stone carver and architect. Gubbaun exchanges his daughter, Aunya, who robbed the crows of their cleverness and taught tricks to foxes, for a disappointing boy, Lugh, who would not learn but do nothing but sit in the sunshine and play little tunes on a flute he had made. Gubbaun realizes his mistake, and Aunya is found by the boy, who brings her home and marries her – though that father-daughter relationship continues to be strained.



A summons comes from over the North Sea, from Balor, King of the Fomor, seeking the Gubbaun to build him a fortress *strong as the foundations of the earth . . . such a dune as never from the beginning of days shaped itself on the ridge of the world*, promising great riches. Perilous journeys and hard work follow. And the family must use their combined wits to find a way to save themselves from evil Balor's sinister plans. The epic ends with a great feast – *the memory of it was honey in the minds of poets for a thousand years* – and the passing of the Gubbaun Saor to the underworld.

So who was the Gubbaun Saor? In Gaelic, his name means “Smith Artisan.” Irish myth had three Craftsmen gods: *Goibhniu*, the Smith, *Credne* the Silversmith, and *Luchta*, the Carpenter. The Celtic blacksmith, *Goibhniu*, stands out. The working of metal and especially of iron could be seen as magical knowledge – mastering the element of fire, transforming the bones of the earth with strength, skill, secret knowledge, and magic into revered and coveted jewelry and weapons. In Christian Celtic myth, the *Goban Saor* was credited with the building of churches. His name was adopted by several saints to show connections with early medieval architecture and their prowess as artisans. Catholicism considers him a historical figure around 650 AD. The influence of various folk stories can be seen in the Wonder Smith.

Lugh in the Wonder-Smith is a musician and poet. But the same name is found in Celtic myth as the one who slings the stone that kills *Balor*, the cyclops and turns his eye against the *Fomorian*s. In the Ulster Cycle, he fathered *Cu Chulainn*. *Lugh* is a name given to the Sun God; and a Storm God. And *Lugh* possessed a beautiful hound .

Aunya does not appear in Celtic myth, but is a striking example of an Irish colleen with the fire of wisdom, a keen commonsense and a sharp tongue to match. Perhaps the spirit of Ella Young resides in her.

Balor is a giant cyclops, “*a blackener of the earth. One eye in the center of his forehead that can devastate walled cities and blast a country side. His breath freezes the sea-furrows.*” The *Fomorian*s were chaotic demons and nature forces of destruction that brought droughts or fierce storms: “*Djinns and dwarfs and giants and goat-footed men and demons of the air, and monstrous beings and strange beasts.*”

Clearly Ella Young assembled her gathered tales of the Wonder-Smith into a literary tale, still there is all that charm and lovely imagery of the Irish mythic world from which they came.

Storytelling is the shortening of the Road.

An Article By Barry McWilliams