

ÁINE
By Linda Costello

Áine, you walk when the day is bright
When blossoms burst open upon the earth
Your startling beauty shimmers with light.

Your glistening innocence, pure and white,
Fresh as the springtime with blessings of birth.
Áine, you walk when the day is bright.

Abundant fertility promises sight
of flowing fields of flowers and mirth
Your startling beauty shimmers with light.

Voluptuous curves that entice and excite,
Irresistibly drawing, despite a wide berth.
Áine, you walk when the day is bright.

When the day is long, and short is the night,
Celebrations abound to honor your worth.
Your startling beauty shimmers with light.

Bright Goddess, through you, my soul takes flight.
I come to know fully, your breadth and your girth.
Áine, you walk when the day is bright.
Your startling beauty shimmers with light.¹

The goddess, Áine, is a goddess of love, growth, and cattle – in other words, fertility, and hers is the bright time of the year. Some versions of the myth say that she is either the wife or daughter of Manannan mac Lirⁱⁱ. Especially in the County Limerick, she is often referred to as a “fairy queenⁱⁱⁱ,” and the feast of Midsummer night was held in her honor.

The etymology of her name seems to come from the Proto-Celtic term for the notion of “radiant,”^{iv} which may, in part, explain her association with Midsummer. There is an ancient cairn and three small ring barrows known as Mullach an Triuir on the summit of Cnoc Áine which is near Knockainy village in Co. Limerick. She was revered up until the 19th century where legend has it that men and women brought large torches of hay up to the summit of Cnoc Áine and they circled the ring barrows anti-clockwise before going down again and sprinkling the ashes of the torches over their fields and livestock.

It is said that there is a stone high up on top of Cnoc Áine that could bestow the gift of poetry to those she welcomed and madness to those she rejected.

She was, most likely, the sovereignty goddess of the Eoghanacht sept in Munster.^v In this legend, her father is said to have been Eoghabhal, King of the Sidhe.

Áine was also associated with wells and springs.^{vi} Tobar-Na-Áine (Well of Áine) was credited with life-restoring powers, so Áine was also associated with healing.

Some sources say that she is also associated with the Yew tree, the Ogham tree of life and death, and it is said that she was not a goddess to offend, as she had a revengeful side to her. She was also known for her ability to seduce and entice men, and some believe that she was leannan sidhe, which means "Fairy Lover". In this form, her chosen subject would be totally spellbound, often to his own demise.^{vii}

The Earl of Desmond happened to spot Aine one day as she was sitting and combing her hair. Overcome with love for her, he took her, and they conceived a child, Geroid Iarla. Geroid had magical qualities that he used in front of his father's court to impress a girl; he was so embarrassed that he ran out of the hall and went toward the lake, where, upon touching the water was turned into a goose. He is said to live under the waters to this day.^{viii}

The goddess, Áine, was repressed by the Christian monks, and most likely assimilated into the church as some aspect of St. Ann, with her wild sexuality stripped from her.^{ix} But, most likely, because her name is associated with natural features, she is a goddess that has not been forgotten. Although there isn't a great deal of information about her, she lives on in legends, in vivid imaginations, and within the pulse of life itself.

I feel honored to be one of her chosen.

ⁱ Costello, Linda, poem written in May 2006

ⁱⁱ Rees, Alwyn and Rees, Brinley, *Celtic Heritage*, Thames and Hudson, 1961, p. 134-135, ISBN 0-500-27039-2

ⁱⁱⁱ MacCana, Proinsias, *Celtic Mythology*, The Hamlyn Publishing Group, 1973, p. 83, ISBN 0-600-00637-6

^{iv} Wikipedia: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Áine>, which references:

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^v O hOgain, Daithi "Myth, Legend and Romance: An Encyclopedia of the Irish Folk Tradition" Prentice Hall Press, (1991) : ISBN 0132759594, pgs 20-21

^{vi} Ross, Anne, *Pagan Celtic Britain*, Academy Chicago Publishers, 1967, p. 281, ISBN 0-89733-435-3

vii McSkimming, S./MacDonald, L., *Gods of the Celts*, Dalriada Publications, 1992

viii Evans-Wentz, W.Y., *The Fairy Faith in Celtic Countries*, Carol Publishing Group – 1990 (1st ed 1966), p.79-80; ISBN 0-8065-1160-5, pgs 79-80

ix MacCana, Proinsias, *Celtic Mythology*, The Hamlyn Publishing Group, 1973, p. 131, ISBN 0-600-00637-6