

Many Battles, Many Deaths Introduction

In the first and second verses of 'The Conversation of Gwyn ap Nudd and Gwyddno Garanhir', Gwyddno petitioned Gwyn for protection and it was granted.

In the third and fourth verses, once his safety has been ascertained, Gwyddno asks Gwyn what land he comes from and receives an enigmatic answer.

Gwyddno:

Since you give me such protection
I will ask you, Lord of Hosts
Where is the land from which you come?

Gwyn:

I come from many battles, many deaths
With shields held aloft,
Many heads pierced by spears.

We know from other sources that Gwyn is the Brythonic Lord of Annwn, 'the Deep', the Otherworld. It is never made explicit that Annwn is the land of the dead but this is strongly suggested by these lines and those that follow.

I would like to pause here and consider the multiple layers of meaning contained in Gwyn's answer that He comes 'from many battles, many deaths.'

One interpretation of Gwyn's answer might be that the land He comes from is any land where there is battle and there is death. Later He refers to attending battles in both Thisworld and the Otherworld and speaks of His presence at the deaths of a number of British warriors. He may be seen to be identifying His land as the battlefield(s) it is duty and destiny to attend, as a God of the dead, living on whilst the Warriors of Britain are in their graves.

Gwyn speaks not just of one land, one battlefield, one battle and set of deaths, but many, across space and across time. It's my personal belief He continues to be present at battles where 'the Warriors of Britain' fight to offer his guidance as a psychopomp (although unlikely in His God-form). He may be the white light at the end of the tunnel witnessed in many near-death accounts.

In these lines Gwyn speaks not only of His land but of His own story. "I come from..." The battles and deaths he has attended have made Him who He is.

I think it possible to read these lines as Him speaking not only of worldly/ otherworldly battles and deaths but personal ones too. Gwyn is fated to fight a battle every year for his beloved, Creiddylad, against his rival, Gwythyr. Every Calan Mai he battles and meets his death in this seasonal struggle.

Gwyn battles to hold back the fury of the spirits and monsters of Annwn to prevent their destruction of the world and against the fury contained within Him.

Gwyn's is the knowledge of the deaths and rebirths that constitute the transformation of souls, both in life through initiatory processes, and in death. These, I believe, He has gone through and continues to go through Himself as the guardian of the cauldron of inspiration and rebirth.

These are just a few of my thoughts and I am sure you can find many more meanings!