

CALAN MAI 2023

Introduction

The focus of this ritual will be the battle of Gwyn and Gwythyr for Creiddylad, mourning the death of Gwyn and welcoming Creiddylad back to the land.

Calan Mai is a Brythonic festival which takes place on the 1st of May. Calan means 'first day' and Mai 'May' and it also known as Calan Haf 'first day of Summer'. On this day Gwyn ap Nudd 'White son of Mist' and Gwythyr ap Greidol 'Victor son of Scorcher' fight for the love of Creiddylad (the first part of Her name means 'heart' and the second 'flow of water'). Both Gwyn and Creiddylad are descendants of Nudd/Lludd making them brother and sister.

This story is found in the medieval Welsh text *Culhwch ac Olwen* (11th C). Here we are told that Creiddylad goes off with Gwythyr but before they can sleep with her Gwyn takes her by force. Gwyn is a king of Annwn, the Otherworld, so it is likely he takes her to Annwn. Gwythyr gathers a host of warriors and attacks Gwyn and fails and they are imprisoned. Arthur then rescues Gwythyr and his men and punishes Gwyn and Gwythyr by determining that they must fight for Creiddylad every Calan Mai but She is to remain in her father's house and neither of them can take her until Judgement Day.

This is likely to be a Christianised variant of an older pre-Christian myth wherein Gwyn (Winter's King) and Gwythyr (Summer's King) battle for Creiddylad who is a Goddess of seasonal sovereignty. On Calan Gaeaf Gwyn takes Creiddylad to Annwn and her absence explains the winter months. On Calan Mai Gwythyr battles Gwyn for Creiddylad and Her return from Annwn explains the coming of summer. Their relationships were likely to be ones of sacred marriage with fertility rites for Gwythyr and Creiddylad celebrated on Calan Mai. Her locking up in Her father's house likely relates to a Christian veto on this. That neither can take Her until Judgement Day may be based upon the deeper wisdom that if Creiddylad was to stay for good with Gwyn or Gwythyr this would result in an eternal summer or winter and the end of the world.

Preparation

This ritual may be performed in a quiet place on a riverbank or in a greenspace or in your garden or at your altar.

Ideas for altar set up include candles for Gwyn and Creiddylad and offerings of locally grown flowers and herbs, spring, river or sea water, and mead or cider.

As an example Sister Aelfwyn (Hayley) has set up an altar to Gwyn and Creiddylad with an image of flowers, a green candle for Gwyn, a yellow candle for Creiddylad, offerings of herbs and water from Chalice Well, Glastonbury and has created a crystal grid called 'the Veil of Creiddylad'.



This prayer can be recited for Gwyn on Nos Galan Mai in order to connect with Him on the evening before His battle followed by a meditation. A suggested offering on this evening is a sprig of thyme.

If I Had To Fight Your Battle

For Gwyn on Nos Galan Mai

If I had to fight your battle
could I wake every day
and live with growing trepidation
about the coming of May?

If I had to fight your battle
could I prepare every year,
knowing the inevitability of cycles
still face my rival with honour?

If I had to fight your battle
could I do so, wind, rain or shine
or would I flee the harsh rule of these islands
and head for sunnier climes?

If I had to fight your battle
would I do so for woman or man,
stature, sovereignty,
or the broken heart of this land?

If I had to fight your battle
would I do so with sword and spear
or resort to guns and nuclear arms
to blast away this deadlock with my fear?

If I had to fight your battle
could I do so until Judgement Day?
If I lost could I let go,
knowing love will never die?

~ Sister Patience (Lorna)

CALAN MAI RITUAL

Opening

Spirits of Place

I honour the spirits of place of this land on which I stand (name local spirits, river deities etc.)

(If on ceded land this is the place for a land acknowledgement.)

Statment of Intent

I come here today to witness the battle of Gwyn and Gwythyr for Creiddylad, to say farewell to Gwyn and to welcome Creiddylad back to the land.

The Battle of Gwyn and Gwythyr for Creiddylad

Meditation

I invite you to close your eyes and bring your attention to you breath - the breath which connects us to all beings, to the Gods, and to the Deep. To tune into this moment, this liminal time between the seasons as we shift from winter into summer on this pivotal point of Calan Mai. Driving the turning of the wheel is the eternal battle between Gwyn and Gwythyr for Creiddylad.

This battle takes place at a ford - at passing point upon a river. I invite you now to picture in your mind's eye that you are standing on a river bank. This may be the bank of a river you know, one in your landscape, or another river. It may be one that appears to you now as the scene of the battle.

On one side of the river spring has arrived and summer is coming. You can see the hawthorns in bloom, the elderflowers, the May flowers in the fields. The hedgerows are abundant with the whiteness of cow parsley. The meadows are alive with wildflowers and with butterflies and bees. Riding through them to, to this riverbank, with the sun shining behind him, comes an armoured warrior and you recognise Him as Gwythyr ap Greidol, Summer's King. On the other side of the river the spring landscape is concealed by mist. From it rides another armoured warrior - Gwyn ap Nudd, Winter's King. His expression is grim for he knows he cannot win this battle yet he shows up to fight it anyway as an expression of His love for

Creiddylad and the land. She comes with Him and waits in the mist for the end.

I leave you here to witness the battle between these two Gods who will fight as mighty warriors and may shift shape into monstrous animals, dragons, into forms that defy the human mind in this liminal place and point in time.

5 - 10 minutes

The battle is now at an end. Gwyn has fallen to the blows of Gwythyr. Gwyn is dead, Gwythyr is the Victor, Creiddylad is crossing the ford into Gwythyr's arms. I invite you now to come back, leave the riverbank, come back into your bodies, come into your seats, and rejoin our gathering for the mourning of Gwyn.

Mourning Gwyn

Our Winter King is dead, our Winter King is gone, from the red blood he has shed the white flowers of May and the hawthorn blossoms will bloom.

Farewell

Farewell my beloved Gwyn ap Nudd whom in the dark of winter has my heart to keep.

Farewell my beloved Gwyn ap Nudd! During winter's night your arms are my refuge.

My beloved king who keeps me warm in the cold still darkness of the blackest night, I bid thee farewell until the sun sets again for the final darkness of winter's night.

As the Summer King rises to light my way, my heart will be with you in Annwn until you ride out over the land.

As you are gone from this earthly realm, I know even as the sun burns it's brightest, you are watching and waiting until it is your time to reign again.

As I bask under the blazing sun and watch in wonder as Creidylad shows her beautiful face, I will save my tears of your leaving.

I know you will return to the land because this is all part of one big cosmic dance.

Farewell Gwyn ap Nudd, my Winter king! Farewell to thee as you rest in Annwn!

~ Arriel

Moonrise

There was the Moon
Bloodred with fate
The stars raining down--
Have I come here too late?

The One who Went Missing dropped her iron crown
The night rent in silence...
And my love rang the dark bell!
And the stars fell
Listen, my strange Universe
My starlight that falls into shadow
Will transform the Curse and the Void into love!
(And I let go)

Etched on the Moon
You whisper the witchrunes
Dream has no gate
Her wings do not wait for
Black wings, alight...

Black wings, take flight!
The rose be my sign
I'll teach you to fly on these scarred wings of mine
Give to a fae hand my heart's bloody brine
(Waken, dear King, at Dream's farthest door)
So the witches can smile, lift their hope on my wings
Give your wish to the Raven who brings
Never More
(Bleeding, I smile on the Night's onyx shore)

There is the Moon
Red like his eyes
Witch on your broom
His wings brush the skies

Come closer and listen in shadows of Doom
(My grave in the Raven)
Call my name and remember...!
Stars of winter...

Butterfly perched on the void
Glittering magic of shadow
The sound of Her wings is the Rose that means Love.

(Come let go...
I'll catch you, for I fell before anyone)

Black wings take flight
The rose be my sign
I'll teach you to fly on these scarred wings of mine
Give to a fae prince your heart's bloody brine
(Waken, dear witch, on the night's diamond shore)
So the witches can smile, lift their hope on my wings
Give your wish to the Raven who brings
Never More
(At Starfall she smiles, like he did before)

I'll carry you down by Mystery's sign
Don't fear to fall now, Butterfly mine!
The sunwind blew strange in a dark swirling gust
This world's fate can change--will you give me your trust?
The river of stars will be healed in my scars
Dreaming far on this bar of gold-silver dust...

Soaring down in the arms of the King of the Night
Take the wishes of everyone and give them our flight
(And set them alight!)
My king, will you teach me to hear the Raven's song...?
My longing for Mystery was Her all along!

Black wings take flight
The rose be my sign
I'll teach you to fly on these scarred wings of mine
Give to a fae king your heart's bloody brine
(Waken, dear witch, on the night's diamond shore)
So the witches can smile, lift their hope on my wings!
(May you dream of King Starlight who lit the Universe...)

~ Thorn

Five minutes silence for mourning the death of Gwyn and saying farewell until His return.

Welcoming Creiddylad

Meditation

The Veil of Creiddylad

Deep beneath the ancient faerie mound in the heart of Annwn dwells the Lady Creiddylad veiled in a cloak of green woven from the essence of otherworld. Forbidden to enter or disturb her sacred space we can only watch from a distance with invisible eyes. There she sits in stillness in all her radiant beauty. She faces ever forward her back to us revealing the shining threads of her veil fashioned by the hands of the great weavers and those who sing life into being. We feel her thoughts and prayers strengthening the threads and bonds between the worlds.

Before her sits a single vessel of water the Lady Creiddylad prepares for the coming of Calan Mai. She prays for the safety of her two lovers one of summer light and one of winter dark. The energy of her prayers are sent up from Annwn and manifest upon the land above as the first shoots of spring. Golden Primrose and the song of the birds. She sings the prayers of Annwn from her heart into the heart of the land, from her heart to our hearts we feel a sense of energy and renewal and we know it is time for the journey home.

Video link - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H13agZb1zn4>

~ Sister Aelfwyn (Hayley)

Welcome Creiddylad, Green Daughter, Bringer of Spring, in Your dress woven from stitchwort and starwort, forget-me-nots and bluebells, with your crown of hawthorn blossoms and your spider silk veil. We welcome You back to this land, Life Bringer, into the arms of Your Summer King, Gwythyr ap Greidol.

Closing

I give thanks to You, Gwyn, Creiddylad and Gwythyr, for allowing me to witness Your mysteries and I give thanks to the spirits of this place.

Winter is over and summer is here until the next turning of the wheel.