

Calan Mai - The Battle of Gwyn and Gwythyr 2024

Preparation

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

Introduction (Sister Patience)

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.

RITUAL

Spirits of Place / Land Acknowledgement (Brother Delight)

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Opening Prayer to Gwyn

(Sister Patience)

A prayer I recite for Gwyn at dawn on Calan Mai as He prepares for His battle with Gwythyr followed by making an offering of a sprig of thyme from my garden.

A Sprig of Thyme

When you don your armour at dawn
On this morning of mist so forlorn

When you rise from your marital bed
Leave your wife for another to wed

When you leave the dark of Annwn
With the knowledge you'll return to your tomb

When you're feeling down and discouraged
Let this sprig of thyme be your courage.

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The Battle of Gwyn and Gwythyr for Creiddylad

This year we are going to be witnessing the Battle of Gwyn and Gwythyr whilst waiting with Creiddylad through a poetic evocation by Sister Aelfwyn.

(Sister Aelfwyn)

Waiting with Creiddylad

Fragments in time merge as the weaving of fates pierce her heart once more.
Two kings wait on the banks of the shore

Spiriting along the well trodden path of blossoming thorn where time slipped through winter where summer is reborn

Waiting in silence as the strangled noise of battle cry determines her love and the raven of spring flies up above

Wasting and weaving the light with the dark, the rushing wind clouding the scorching sun burning all to mist and vapour she wishes sleep would take her

To the place where the faerie king lays down by her side laughing into the mists

Cold is the space between the heart of two enemies as the time between worlds twists

So here She lays in the space between the dark and light

She cries for the Kings to take away the pain of their eternal fight.

It is your turn now to spend some time waiting with Creiddylad as she witnesses the battle (10 mins)

She awakes upon the close of battle sunlight upon her brow crowned in the light as Queen of summer

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Mourning Gwyn

The battle is at an end, Our Winter King is dead, our Winter King is gone. Gone, gone, gone our Blessed One, our Holy One, our Gatherer of Souls.

The hounds of Annwn howl and the monastic devotees of Annwn voice their laments.

Calan Mai Song (Brother Delight)

Faerie Funeral Bell (Sister Aelfwyn)

Gather round ye mourners upon the eve of May

Here rides the procession
for the king of the Fae

No feast is layed down
where the king he fell

So sound the haunting chant
of faerie funeral bell

So dance ye not
upon this fated day

and gather round ye mourners for the king of the Fae

In the May Snow (Sister Patience)

I.
In the May Snow
I mourn for You.

Crack willow take
my soul again

to the raven's
places of Annwn,

to where the bones
are old and grey.

II.
In the cold castle
lies Your tomb

and on its corners
stand four cranes

to coax Your soul
from death and gloom,

to sing you back
to life again.

(Space for participants to share songs and poems)

5 minutes silence to mourn Gwyn

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Welcoming Creiddylad

She awakes upon the close of battle sunlight upon her brow crowned in the light as Queen of summer hail Creiddylad Queen of the May (Sister Aelfwyn)

(Sister Patience)

She Walks Between Worlds and Lovers

It is summer in this-world when she is here
winter in this-world without her.
In Gwythyr's arms she is Lady Life:
coming to be as the first snowdrop
purple yellow crocuses are her slippers
pink red primroses her cloak. Her smile
her lips are daffodils' long trumpets.
May flowers weave her grassy hair
as she embraces this-world's ruler.
In dewy glades Creiddylad is May Queen
in sacred marriage headdress a veil of hawthorn
wedding dress woven from wood anemone
wood sorrel she lies with him in woodlands
of bluebells starwort becoming buzzing fields
heliotropic gaze of ox-eye daisies poppies
face alive with vibrant butterflies and bees
exulting in the dance of pollen's gold dust
until the seasons turn and cold winds come
she sees her time in this-world is over
and walks between worlds and lovers.

(Space for participants to share songs and poems)

Song / Chant for Gwythyr (Sib Temperance)

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Sharing of Experiences

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Closing Prayers (Sister Patience will ad lib)