INTRODUCING...

MORGAN DAIMLER

MOON BOOKS

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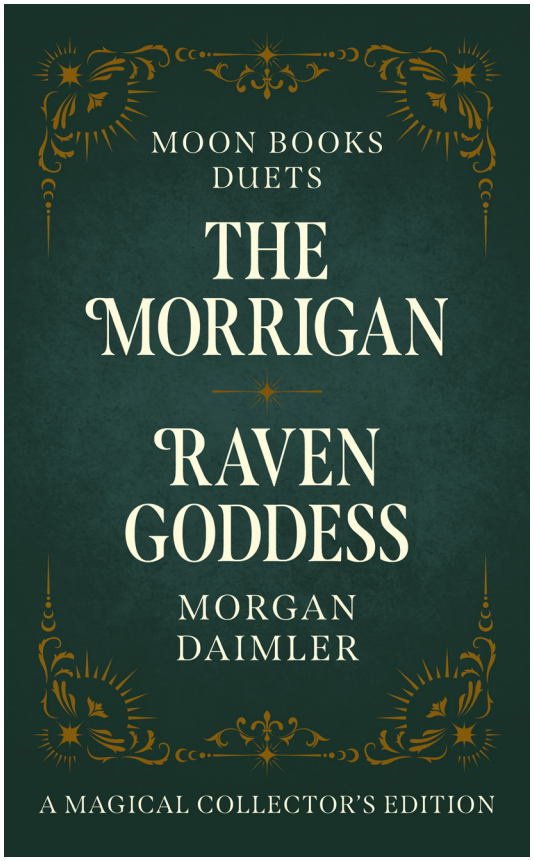
The Morrigan, Battle, and Sovereignty

BY MORGAN DAIMLER

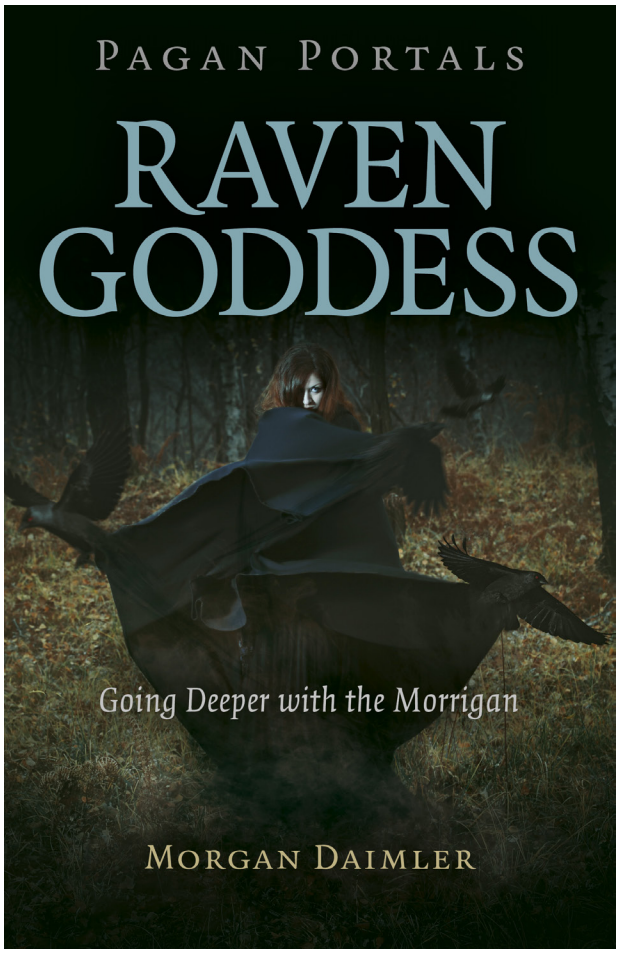
One of the most popular and intriguing Irish goddesses is the Morrigan, a figure who has appeared across mythology and folk belief for as long as we have written material from Ireland, and has even found a place in modern fiction. A powerful goddess, she often appears in older stories as an agent of change, encouraging warriors to fight and stirring up battle when it's necessary. In more modern understandings she is a deity who encourages people to find their own sense of power and sovereignty, to face difficult situations, and to embrace inner strength. Although she has a somewhat dark reputation among some pagans, most of that comes from later Christian recasting of the Morrigan as a demon or terror of the night. In the original material and among many of her devotees today she is viewed as a strong goddess who acts in beneficial ways for those who follower her and for the wider issues she is connected to.



The first thing to understand with the Morrigan is that her name is also a title, meaning that it is used as a personal name for her but is also used as a title for other similar deities, most notably her two sisters. This can and often does cause confusion and also opens the question of what the (individual) Morrigan's name might be, or if she has one, however as a general rule of thumb when we see the Morrigan acting as an individual being in a story, that is the singular being, while when we see it used as a title its either explicitly stated as such or the beings other name is used first. There are two possible meanings of the name: Phantom Queen and Great Queen. The queen part is undisputed, but the initial portion 'mor' or 'mór' is where the issue of translation comes in. In the oldest sources its always given as Morrigan, which would most likely translate to queen of phantoms/ specters. Mor is thought to come from an older root word that means, roughly, spirits of the dead, and also gives us our modern word nightmare (originally

a term for a supernatural being that tormented people's sleep). However if the first part of the name is given an accent mark, called a síneadh fada, it is read as great, expansive, vast, giving us great queen.

The second version of the name is found in later material, and it's unclear whether it was a genuine understanding of the name or a scribal error but either way both forms can be found today. Scholars tend to favour the phantom queen interpretation while the great queen version is more popular among pagans. Both views offer insight into who and what the Morrigan is.



A persistent question around the Morrigan is whether she is one individual goddess or three different goddesses. The answer here varies depending on a person's spiritual beliefs. In mythology the Morrigan is a single deity in herself but shares her name, as a title, with her two sisters, Badb and Macha; these three are referred to as '*in tri Morrignae*' or the three Morrigans. *The Sanas Cormaic*, an early source, describes the three Morrigans as '*raven women*' [mna trogain] who stir up strife, implying that the three act together, which is something we often see across myths. In neopaganism some people have chosen to interpret this idea of three Morrigans as describing a single being who has three aspects, and others have merged the Irish myth with the modern idea of the maiden, mother, crone goddess. In many of the stories however we find the Morrigan acting as a distinct individual being, alongside her two sisters Macha and Badb, as the previously mentioned three Morrigans. Together these three powerful goddesses enact magic on their enemies or incite armies to fight, and individually each has her own stories about battle, war, and victory, and each is connected to sovereignty in different ways.

The Morrigan, both as an individual and as a group, can be found across a wide array of Irish myths. The Lebor Gabala Erenn tells us that she is a member of the Tuatha De Danann and is the daughter of Ernmas and Delbaeth, along with her sisters Badb and Macha; her other three sisters are the sovereignty goddesses Eriu, Banba, and Fodla; her husband is the Dagda. She is said to have several children in different stories, although the most famous may be Meiche, who had to be killed because his heart carried three serpents who would have laid waste to Ireland if they had broken free. This is, perhaps, a lesson in the hard choices we find in life, where the best strategy is also the most painful

and personally costly. It also shows that the Morrigan is not unfamiliar with grief or with loss, despite her fearsome reputation.

The Morrigan regularly appears in stories in the form of a black bird, sometimes specified as a raven but more often as a crow, specifically a hooded crow. The hooded crow, also called a scald crow in older sources, is a bird that is dark grey with black wings, tail, and head, so that it looks a lot like it is wearing a black cloak. In the *Táin Bó Cuailgne* she also takes three other animal forms: a red eared heifer, an eel, and a grey wolf. It's unclear if she might take these three forms more often, but it does make clear that she can if and when she chooses to. In several tales she has a human form which is referred to as a '*richt*' in older Irish implying it is a disguise not her true form. These disguise forms include an old woman as well as a beautiful young maiden and show up in stories where she is trying to trick someone into not recognizing her (usually Cu Chulainn). There is also at least one reference, in the *Cath Maige Rath*, where she is described as a 'hag' [cailleach], appearing in the form of a grey-haired old woman, dancing over the sword points and shield rims of the army before battle. In only one story though are we given what might be her true appearance, that of a red-haired woman. This happens in the *Táin Bó Regamna*, a pre-tale of the *Táin Bó Cuailgne*, where Cu Chulainn meets the Morrigan as a woman with long red hair driving a chariot who later transforms into a black bird; it's the only occurrence where her form isn't referred to in any way as a disguise. For those seeking her today it is important to remember that she is can take many forms and have various appearances, even when she is in a human body, and that she is just as likely to engage with a person as a crow or raven as she is to appear human.

The Morrigan often appears in myths as an agent of change, encouraging people or circumstances to move in new directions or setting circumstances up to change the status quo. In the *Cét-Cath Maige Tuired*, the battle against the Fir Bolg, the Morrigan goes with the warriors to the field of battle and sets up a series of stone pillars so that the fighters cannot retreat but must fight to the finish. In the *Cath Maige Tuired* she appears to incite the vital action of the story, getting Lugh to move against the Fomorians who were oppressing the Tuatha De Danann through the half-Fomorian/half Tuatha, King Bres. At the time the Tuatha De Danann, king Nuada was unable to rule because he had lost an arm in the battle against the Fir Bolg, disqualifying him from ruling, so the warrior Bres was chosen to lead in his place. Bres was the son of a Tuatha De Danann mother and a Fomorian father, and once in power he allowed his paternal kin to heavily tax and oppress his mother's people, causing them much misery. The Morrigan appeared to Lugh to encourage him to rise up and lead a rebellion against Bres; to do this she used a specific type of incitement, a kind of spoken charm:

> *"Undertake a battle of overthrowing," so sang the goddess Morrigan turning to Lug, "Awake, make a hard slaughter, smiting bodies, attacks boiling, greatly burning, devastating, the people to a man crying out..."*
> **(translation M Daimler, 2014)**

Her ploy worked and Lugh took up the cause, leading the Tuatha De Danann in a great battle against Bres,

defeating the Fomorians and ousting Bres as king. Similarly in the final act of the *Táin Bó Cuailigne* the Morrigan appears to incite the warriors to break the stalemate that has formed, so that they will fight and ultimately end the great cattle raid; she does this by appearing to the leaders of the armies and chanting about a fierce battle and their ultimate victory. Emboldened by these words the groups join in a final confrontation.

In the *Tain Bo Regamna* she appears as a woman driving a cow and encounters Cu Chulainn. The two exchange verbal barbs before he finally is driven to try to attack her at which point she turns into a black bird and continues to taunt him, prophesying the forthcoming cattle raid of Cooley [*Táin Bó Cuailigne*] which Cu Chulainn will play a vital role in. The cow she is driving is also a vital component to that cattle raid, as the Morrigan has just bred it with the Donn Cuiligne of Ulster, one of two magical bulls which form the point of contention that begins the cattle raid; the bulls are in fact shapechanged fairy men who have been engaged in a long battle with each other in various forms. By breeding the cow with the bull of Ulster and then taking her back to Connacht the Morrigan is setting up the circumstances for the calf to be killed by Finnbennach, the other magical bull, which in some versions of the story is an essential aspect of the cattle raid. One might interpret her actions as causing the cattle raid itself, and also causing Cu Chulainn to promise he would participate through a form of incitement. It is interesting to note as well that her arranging for the occurrence of the cattle raid also results in the final, ultimate, confrontation of the two magical bulls which results in both of their deaths and ends their long running animosity. While we might look at her involvement in their deaths and see it as a bad thing we can also look at it as a kindness, because she freed the two fairy men from a cycle of constant competition and fighting that had bound them across a dozen forms.

When we see the Morrigan acting to incite battles it is often interpreted on a surface level as the Morrigan simply creating conflict and discord – even the *Sanas Cormaic*, a historic source, accuses her and her sisters of '*stirring up strife*'. But I think if we look more deeply we see instead that her actions aren't for the sake of causing problems in themselves but are to move events forward, disrupt the status quo, and create changes that are ultimately positive. In the *Cath Maige Tuired* her incitement of Lugh, while starting a horrific battle, eventually results in the Tuatha De Danann being freed from oppression. In the *Táin Bó Regamna* her actions ensure Cu Chulainn's participation in the cattle raid, which is essential to the unfolding events and to the meeting of the two bulls, and her stealing the cow and breeding it with the Donn Cuailigne may have been important in the final confrontation of the two bulls/fairy men. In the *Táin Bó Cuailigne* her incitement of the armies results in the final confrontation between the groups and breaks the stalemate they were in. In all of these examples the Morrigan is a force behind the events, encouraging action in place of inaction, and arranging events in ways that can be painful but ultimately result in a better outcome for at least some of the parties involved.

The Morrigan isn't just a goddess who encourages others to fight battles however – she fights them herself too, using both magic and combat. In the *Cét-Cath Maige Tuired* she appears with Badb and Macha casting magic against the Fir Bolg to help the Tuatha De Danann win the upcoming battle;

in the *Cath Maige Tuired* she meets with the Dagda for a yearly tryst after which she promises to use magic to wound one of the Fomorian kings, which she subsequently does:

"Afterwards she commands the Dagda to strip his land, that is Mag Scetne, against the Fomorians, and told the Dagda to call together the aes dana of Ireland to meet at the Ford of Unsen and she would go to Scetne and injure with magic the king of the Fomorians, that is Indech mac De Domnann is his name, and she would take the blood of his heart and kidneys of his battle-ardor from him. Because of that she will give to the gathered hosts the blood in her two palms, striking, groaning, warlike by the Ford of Unsen. Ford of Utter Destruction was its name afterwards because of the magical injury done to the king."
(translation M Daimler, 2014)

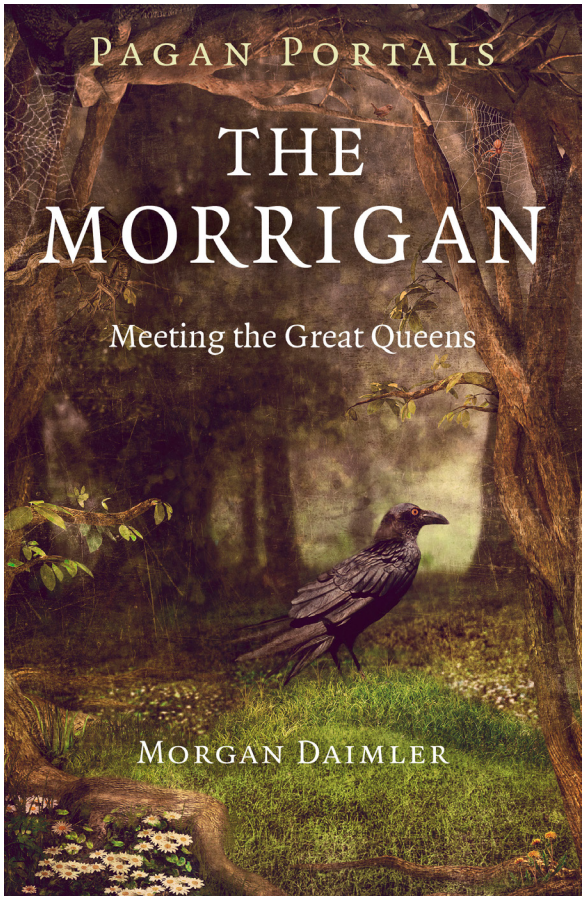
Later when called on by Lugh to say what she will do in the battle, she promises to pursue and kill enemy warriors. In the *Dindshenchas* entry 'Odras', the Morrigan, steals cows from a human woman who pursues her back to the sidhe of Cruachan (the Morrigan's home) and when the woman won't relent, the Morrigan uses magic to transform her into a pool of water. From these examples we can see that the Morrigan is not only a force of incitement for change but also a being who acts to bring about some changes directly, both encouraging others to fight and fighting alongside them. We might argue from this that the Morrigan doesn't ask others to do things she wouldn't do herself, and that when she encourages battles, no matter how hard or bloody they might be, she is just as willing to fight those battles herself when needed. But she doesn't fight in place of others, rather she fights beside them as an active presence and an active force.

The Morrigan is a goddess who prophecies, and perhaps sees more of what is to come than others, which may explain why she shows up to incite change and knows exactly when and where to do so. But beyond encouraging those things she can also offer glimpses into what is to come for her people. When the battle of Maige Tuired is over she appears and offers two prophecies, one of peace, and one of struggle. The peace prophecy is well known and begins:

"Peace to sky.
Sky to earth.
Earth below sky,
strength in each one,
a cup overfull,
filled with honey,
sufficiency of renown.
Summer in winter,
spears supported by warriors,
warriors supported by forts.
Forts fiercely strong;
banished are sad outcries…"
(translation M Daimler, 2014)

It offers a hopeful view, on the heels of a hard battle, that the world will be a good place, full of success and fruitfulness. In contrast the second prophecy foresees a later period of strife when social order is inverted – evil is favoured over goodness, corruption overtakes virtue, and society falls into disarray. The second prophecy has often been criticized as overly harsh and some scholars have suggested it was a later addition reflecting the scribes (likely Christian) opinions, but nonetheless it can have value in understanding the Morrigan. She isn't a goddess who promises us

a perfect life after winning a single battle, but one who offers both hope and caution when looking to the future. She shows us that there can and will be times of plenty and victory but that those are followed by further struggle, because life is a constant cycle of fighting and resting. One might argue that through this lens she is encouraging us to enjoy what we can when we can and be prepared for what we must inevitably deal with to have that happiness.



Sovereignty was a key aspect of Irish pagan belief, where we find many stories about a king or would-be-king needing the blessings of a goddess of sovereignty in order to rule. In one story, for example, several brothers encounter an old woman who asks each for a kiss; they all refuse except the youngest who kisses her, after which she transforms into a beautiful young woman and declares that he will be the next king. In another tale the king has a vision of the God, Lugh, and a goddess of sovereignty in which he receives important messages about his rule. The belief was that only with the blessing of this goddess could a king and his kingdom prosper, and that if that blessing wasn't granted or was withdrawn the king would quickly fall to ruin. Each of the named kings of the Tuatha De Danann was associated with or married to a goddess of sovereignty, showing that this idea was important even beyond human kingdoms.

The Morrigan is a goddess associated with sovereignty, although not in the more obvious ways that deities like Eriu or Áine might be. Rather the Morrigan is connected to sovereignty not as a goddess who directly grants it but as one who offers the opportunity to earn it and supports those who have it rightfully. We see this in her actions to bring down the failed king Bres and to encourage Lugh who would become king after the battle with the Fomorians. We also see shades of this in her as the wife of the Dagda, who was himself a king of the Tuatha De Danann and later king of all the sidhe of Ireland. Some might also see her aspects as a sovereignty goddess in her contentious relationship with Cu Chulainn, who was too hot tempered to be a king and who broke a treasure of the Tuatha De Danann, the Lia Fal, when it refused to cry out under his foster-son, as it would for anyone meant to be king. Although the Morrigan's relationship with Cu Chulainn is complex she certainly didn't seem to favour him for kingship and often acted against him in various contexts.

Scholars have argued that the Morrigan has connections to

sovereignty through her purview of war, which makes and unmakes kings. She may also be associated with sovereignty through the specifically Irish form of warfare that is the cattle raid. These skirmishes which – despite the picture painted by the epic tales – didn't usually have a high body count were vital because they controlled where the wealth of different groups went. Cows were effectively the money of the time, animals which were rarely slaughtered but provided a variety of dairy products and related foodstuff that supported communities. To have cows was to have wealth and status, something that we can perhaps see in one of the only preserved references to a prayer to the Morrigan, found in the Dindshenchas, where we find a man praying to her for success in a cattle raid so that he may be able to marry the woman he loves.

If this is who and what the Morrigan was historically then where is her place today in a world that is very different from Iron Age Ireland? For the Morrigan is certainly still found today, an active deity and a force that moves both behind the scenes and more blatantly. But the world today is not the world that existed in the mythology or even the world that existed when those stories were recorded, and so too the Morrigan isn't limited by the roles she played and the influences she had a thousand years ago or even further into the past. She has evolved as her followers have evolved and she has adapted as the world has changed. While we could still find soldiers today calling on the Morrigan we also find people relating to her and praying to her over more personal battles. She can still be viewed as a deity of battle but the battles she might incite or aid with are less epic and more individual. In the same way while she is still a sovereignty goddess, as much as she ever was, the sovereignty we find in the world today is less about kings ruling countries and more about individual agency and autonomy. She is a deity who can and will push us to face what we fear and to make difficult decisions that will lead to better lives, and she is a goddess who doesn't shy away from hard choices and necessary loss. Just as that man in the Dindshenchas prayed to her for his own success in a way that fell under her purview, we can call on her today to help us overcome challenges and succeed.

The Morrigan across the stories is far more complex than simply a goddess of war and battle, although she certainly is those things as well. She inspires us to fight for ourselves and to meet our challenges head on. She shows us the power of looking to the future and seeing both the good and the bad that awaits us, and choosing to keep pushing forward anyway. She shows us that action and inaction are both choices and that all choices have a cost, and urges us to choose well. She speaks to us today through the old myths but also through new stories, through novels, and through our dreams. She is the sound of crows cawing as they fly overhead; the cry of those defying their own oppression; the blood, sweat, and tears we shed as we try to be more than our circumstances. She is the force that breaks through boundaries, and the urge to defy limitations. She is, as a goddess of strife and of war, a power of life, a force which breaks boundaries and refuses to accept the status quo. And as such, she will always be with us, no matter how her form or stories change.

The Morrigan is an ancient deity, complex and powerful, but she is one who is still very much in the world today, both in popculture

and neopaganism. The past and the mythology shape our understanding of her and current engagement from modern devotees anchors her solidly in the modern world. Her name is given two different meanings and while we might be tempted to see those meanings as contrasting or to want to know which one is the truest, I believe that ultimately both speak to who the Morrigan is: both the queen of phantoms who rules the battlefield and its aftermath as well as the great queen who offers us a way to understand our own power and strength. She is not a being who can be limited or who can be easily digested, rather she is one made of nuances and contradictions, and it is only by accepting that that we can begin to understand her. She offers us a way to embrace our personal power, but only if we are willing to work for it, to face our own fears and move past them, because ultimately sovereignty, even personal sovereignty, can't be given – it can only be earned.

Active Engagement

The Morrigan is not a subtle goddess and those who seek her today usually find her quite responsive; while finding solid information about her can be difficult finding the goddess Herself is not. Sometimes she appears to people who aren't looking for her, showing up in a flurry of black feathers in dreams or in the watchful eyes of crows in the waking world. But other times a person might choose to seek her out of their own accord.

In my own experience finding the Morrigan is not difficult. If you put in effort to engage with her, you will feel some kind of response – although it's worth remembering that sometimes the answer will be no. When she does come into a person's life she often acts, as described in this article, as an agent of change who will push us to throw off things that oppress us or to encourage us to step into our own power. This can be an intense energy, especially if you aren't ready to move forward or let some things go. But for those who invite the Morrigan in knowing who and what she is, you will find her a powerful and invigorating force in your life.

Inviting the Morrigan into your practice or spirituality is not complicated. Read about her, listen to people's experiences with her, and pray to her. If you'd like you can make a small altar to her to show your interest. This doesn't have to be complex although it can be if that's what you like. We don't have any historic examples of what a shrine or sacred space for the Morrigan would look like so I generally encourage people today to follow their own instincts and make the space what you feel resonates. Trust your own instincts, and if you continue connecting to her you can adapt and grow your altar as you go along. If you'd like to you can also make offerings to the Morrigan; again we don't have specific historic examples but the wider modern consensus seems to be that dairy products, alcohol, art, poetry, and acts of service are appreciated.

By building an altar, making offerings, and praying to the Morrigan you can build a connection to her. You can do this if you want her help with the things she is particularly associated with or if you'd just like to have that connection with her. Just remember after you begin to pay attention to your dreams and to the world around you as she is known to communicate in omens and visions. Put out your intention, and then wait and watch to see how she speaks to you and what she has to say.

Part II

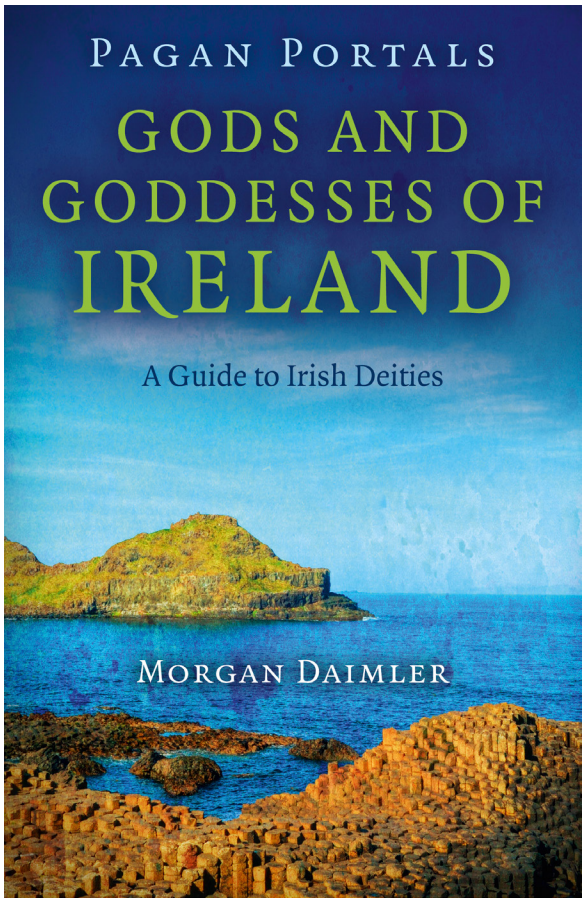
Irish Mythology

Seeking in the Mists

Gods and Goddesses of Ireland

BY MORGAN DAIMLER

Many people today find the deities of Ireland intriguing and that allure leads to the desire to further investigate. It's not difficult to understand why: the Gods of Ireland are many and diverse, their stories fascinating and often heart wrenching. In the past decade even deities who were once obscure and less often spoken of in modern paganism have gained ground in the popular forum so that we hear of Manannán and the Dagda now instead of just the Morrigan and Lugh. Even those like Clíodhna, Midhir, and Áine who were once almost unknown outside of their home places, are seeing a resurgence across the wider modern pagan community. As the popularity of the various Irish deities and of Irish paganism more generally has increased it has left some people searching for how to connect to these beings and this path, in a sea of conflicting possibilities. There are, of course, endless ways that people may find themselves on the path of Irish paganism from cultural immersion to casual fiction but once you feel that draw the challenge becomes finding your way through the mists that cloak the Gods as they move in our world.



The best sources for getting to know the Gods and Goddesses of Ireland are threefold: the living land, the mythology, and the stories that are still told about them. These different sources work together to create a full understanding of who these powers are and from that understanding we can then connect to them on our own personal levels. For some this may seem counterintuitive as the first step instinctively might feel like it should be simply reaching out directly to the Gods. Indeed sometimes it is the deities who have reached out to us and pulled us into their orbit and whichever comes first their presence is often a constant as we travel this course. But we live in a time where

we are, largely, disconnected from the living land, myths, and stories that are the biography of the Gods and to truly know them its important to have that layered context. If we already have that feeling of personal connection then learning more about who the gods were and are builds on it; if we don't have that feeling of connection to start then giving ourselves cultural context gives them a place to take root within us. In all cases it is valuable.

The living land tells the stories of the deities as strongly as any written or oral source. The Gods and Goddesses of Ireland are intertwined throughout the land, their names left on many places across the island, their stories left in the stones and soil. You don't have to physically go there if that's not possible, although of course if you can that's a wonderful option as well, but learning about the places associated with any specific deity that calls to you is a very powerful way to connect to that deity. Every God and Goddess has their special places that we know of from place-name tales and from folklore and each of these places and the story attached to it tells us a great deal about that deity, who they are and what they are like. The Mound of Hostages at Tara is a place where the Morrigan, Badb, and Macha are said to have done great battle magic, for example, and we are told that the Morrigan's son Meiche died at the river Berba. Áine's son lives in Lough Guir, Aiobheall at Craig Leith, and Lugh's wife Búi has her place at Knowth. The land and her stories tell us all of these things.

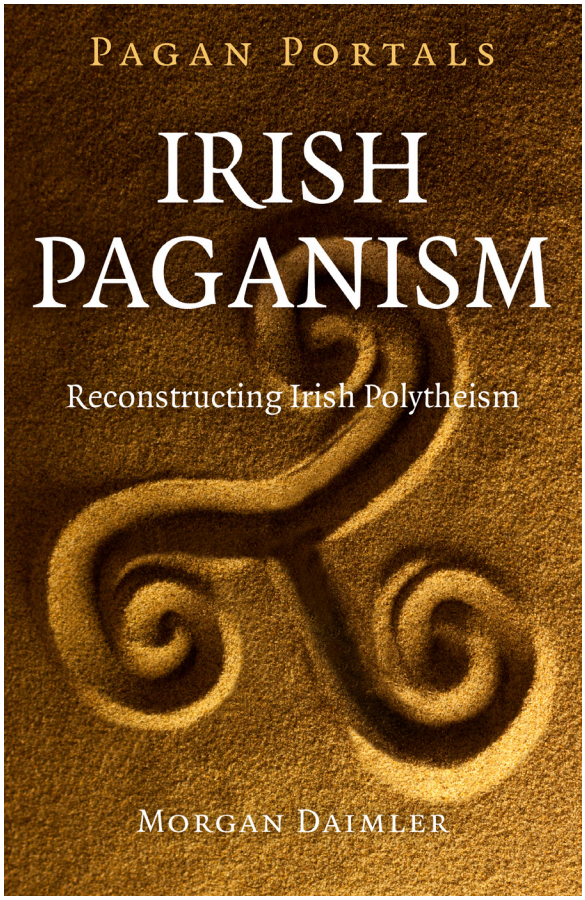
Along with an understanding of their connection to the land itself it's important to read the myths that have been recorded in writing. Preferably the older myths rather than the retellings because the retellings are often much closer to imaginative fiction than the source material. The older translations of the myths also have their issues, particularly since they were done during the Victorian period and are prone to editing out material the translator found inappropriate (read: explicit) or adding in material not in the originals which the translator thought should be there. Ideally read several different versions of each myth to get a feel for how the translator tells the story differently as this will help you gain a deeper understanding of the deity you are learning about. There are also some questions about the people who wrote the stories down originally and their potential biases and motives, but their work is still vital and essential

PANTHEON

The Irish

MORGAN DAIMLER

for us today. The older mythology provides the best picture for how the Irish Gods were seen and understood across a thousand years of history. Reading these myths and seeing the various ways the deities appear and interact helps us understand them as they were and gives a context for them within the culture they grew from. In particular in studying the Irish gods one should look at the Mythological cycle, although the gods do appear throughout all the Irish myths in various guises. The important places to start are the *Lebor Gabala Erenn*, *Cét-Cath Maige Tuired*, and *Cath Maige Tuired*, all of which can be found in easily accessible translations both inline and in print. These stories in particular tell of how the Tuatha De Danann came to Ireland and give us details about their personalities and powers. For those who balk at the idea of a lot of reading there are several good podcasts, like *Story Archaeology*, that read and discuss the Irish myths and stories aloud.



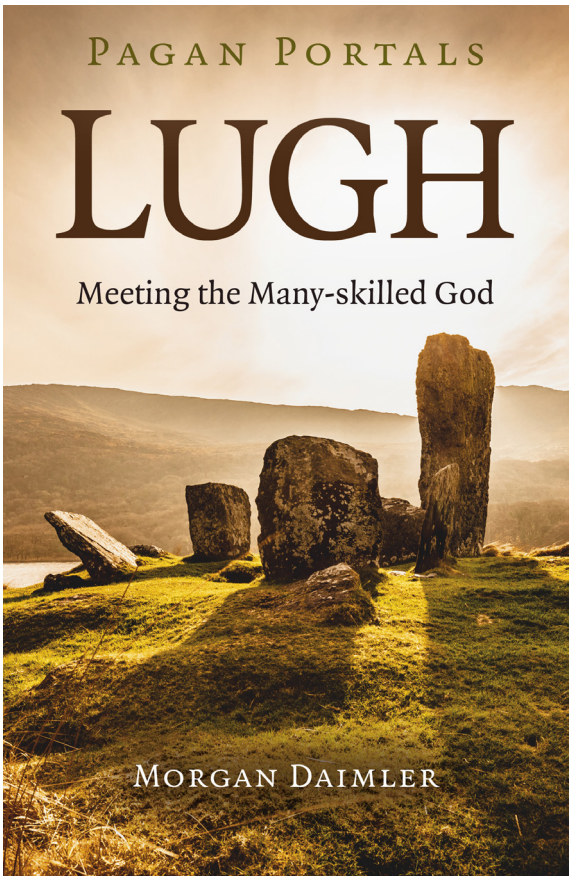
Moving forward from the land and the written myths we reach out to the living stories, whether in writing or told by storytellers. The oral stories that have been told and are still being told also serve as a voice for the Gods and some of these are written down and shared that way as well. These stories are wide and varied, some truer to the old myths and some branching off into new, strange territory. The Gods are not static beings who exist only in rigid forms, like stone statues, but rather are vibrant beings, individuals with personality and agency that grow and change. Their relationships to the land and their layers of recorded myths establish who they are and have been but the stories that are told today rooted in those sources add to what we know about them as individual beings with agency and power.

The Gods of Ireland are as alive and active today as they have ever been but they remain to many people mysterious and obscure. There is no one single way to connect to them, no single method that allows perfect understanding. Rather just like building a relationship with a human being connecting to a deity is multi-layered and requires work on several levels. The real key for those of us who are seeking the Gods is to put in the effort to keep moving forward and keep seeking, to realize that there is always more to learn and more to feel, more to experience and more to understand. There is no end point on this journey, only the realization that each step has its own value.

Lugh God of Many Skills

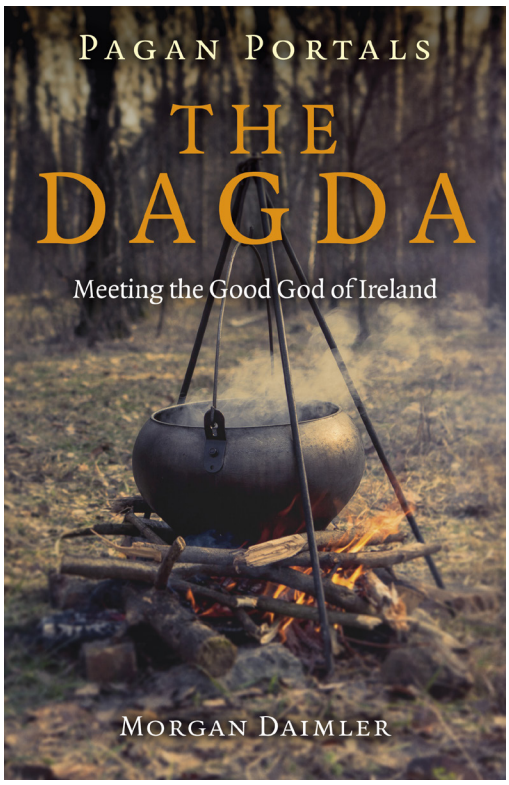
BY MORGAN DAIMLER

The Tuatha De Danann have long been a main feature in Irish mythology and folklore, with some falling into obscurity and some finding popularity. One of the ones who has always maintained a prominent place in people's minds is Lugh. He appeals to a wide array of people because he is a deity with many purviews and broad appeal, a god of warriors but also of craftsmen, who stood up against injustice perpetrated against his people and fought to restore right order. Lugh may also have been so popular because he was a very relatable deity, one who could be hot tempered but was also a good leader and who is shown caring deeply about his family, especially his father Cian. He has many epithets but perhaps the most well-known is Samildanach, many skilled, because of the many arts he had mastered and used. In many ways he can be the ideal deity for this modern world and one who is likely to easily adapt to technology.



Lugh features in a several of the more important stories in the Mythological Cycle, including the pivotal *Cath Maige Tuired* which tells of the great battle between the Tuatha De Danann and the Fomorians. In that story we learn of how Lugh came to join his father's people at Tara, the seat of the high king, just as the war was beginning. This came at a vital time as the Tuatha de Danann were set to battle against a fierce and fearsome enemy, led by several kings including Balor of the evil eye, who had a poisonous eye that would destroy any army it looked on. There had been a prophecy that Balor's grandson would be the only one who could kill him and Lugh was that grandson, the child of Balor's daughter, Eithne, and the Tuatha de Danann warrior, Cian. Lugh is challenged when he tries to enter Tara and to get in he proves that he possesses all of the skills valued by the Gods, and by extension by the society of the time. This puts him in position to join the Tuatha de Danann as they prepare to fight and to play the role that he was prophesied to play in the battle itself by challenging and killing his grandfather. We see this same story from a different perspective in the later tale of the *Fate of the Children of Tuireann*, where we learn of Lugh's conception, birth, and role in the battle against the Fomorians only in this version of the story it is Lugh who encourages the Tuatha de Danann to rise

up against their oppressors and who leads them in that fight. In both versions Lugh and his actions before and in the battle are crucial, establishing the importance of the deity in a wider context.



Mythology isn't our only source of information about Lugh. Unlike some other members of the Tuatha de Danann his importance was enough that he remained prominent in folklore, especially in the west of Ireland. In the folk stories he is often euhemerized into a pseudohistorical or human figure who none the less carries out many of the same roles found in the mythology. For example, in a common version of the story Balor is a tyrant who lives on Tory Island, and there is a prophecy that only his grandson can kill him so he locks his daughter away in a tower on his island. A man named Cian in turn is put in charge of watching the magical cow of a smith and when the cow escapes he has no choice but to try to go to Tory Island to reclaim her from Balor who has taken her. Cian gets help from Manannan to sneak onto the island in disguise and manages to both reclaim the cow and have a tryst with Balor's daughter by following Manannan's advice. He returns the following year to claim his son, Lugh, and rescue him from Balor, narrowly escaping with the child. Balor isn't so easily left behind however and arranges for Cian's death setting in motion the events of his own doom as Lugh then determines to kill Balor to avenge his father. He does this and succeeds in ridding the area of Balor's influence, echoing the older mythological tales of his fight against Balor, King of the Fomorians.

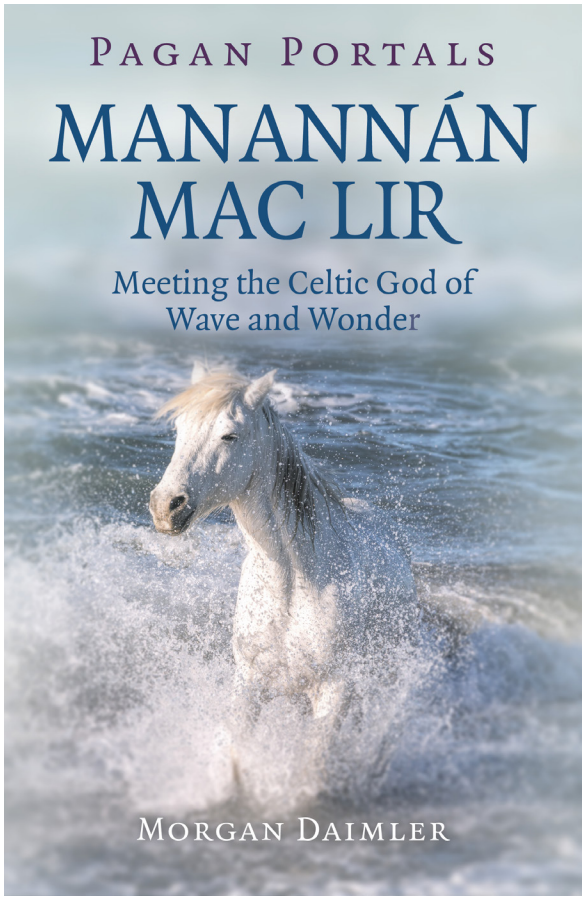
One of the most pervasive modern views of Lugh is that of a sun god, so it may surprise people to learn that this idea isn't found in the mythology but comes from the later 19th century Celtic Revival period. During this time many of the Irish Gods were interpreted through a classical lens, that is they were compared to Gods from Greek and Roman cultures, with the idea that the way these classical deities were understood formed a template to understand all pagan gods. With that in mind there was a belief that there must be a sun god to be found and the consensus was that Lugh fit the bill, based on this description from Cross & Slover's 1936 version of the tale:

> *"It is then Bres, son of Elathan, rose up and said: "It is a wonder to me the sun to be rising in the west to-day, and it rising in the east every other day."*
>
> *"It would be better for us it to be the sun," said the Druids.*
>
> *"What else is it?" said he.*
>
> *"It is the shining of the face of Lugh, son of Ethlinn,"."*

Although the epithet 'sun face' was not uncommon and we see several other deities described that way this particular passage with Lugh and his connection to the August harvest festival of Lughnasa [assembly of Lugh] seems to have

inspired the view of him as a sun god. While not found in older myths or stories it has certainly become enormously popular in modern paganism and artwork and is a view that resonates with many people.

Another interesting modern connection that we find with Lugh is to the well-known Leprechaun. This comes from an early modern and modern folk etymology of the word Leprechaun which parsed it as 'little Lugh body' and connected the word to the idea of the diminishment of the older pagan Gods. While we know that Leprechaun in older Irish (Luchorpan) is borrowed in from the Latin Lupercus and was used to possibly replace the older Irish Abacc. The Lugh connection has been persistent in its popularity, hinting again at the wider significance and popularity of the God. While the idea of Lugh being directly connected to Leprechauns is recent and spurious we do find a deeper connection between him and the fairy folk. As with all of the Tuatha de Danann, Lugh went to live in the sidhe, the fairy mounds, after the Gaels came to Ireland taking up residence in the sidhe of Rodrubán. In the *Táin Bó Cuilgne* Lugh comes to the aid of his son, Cu Chulainn, appearing out of the sidhe and taking Cu Chulainn into the sidhe for three days to be healed.



In the modern world Lugh is seen as all of these things and more. People look to him as a god of good weather, the sun, and the harvest but also of technology, like computers and cell phones, things that emphasize complex skills and multiple uses. He has retained his older powers and associations but gained new ones, evolving along with humanity so that he is just as needed in a modern city as he was in an Iron Age Celtic ring fort. If the pattern holds true then Lugh will continue to be a popular and often invoked deity well into the foreseeable future.

Lugh is a complex deity with layers of folklore and beliefs surrounding him. He appears across mythology as a warrior and as a king of the Tuatha de Danann and into folklore still as a hero contesting against forces of tyranny. He has been re-envisioned as a sun god and is celebrated as such by many people, and is understood to have a connection to the fairy folk. Called the many skilled, Lugh is indeed a versatile God whose many abilities as well as the experiences we find him going through in stories make him a God that people can easily feel an affinity for. We have barely touched on even a fraction of his stories or character here and those who are interested in Lugh can begin diving deeper by looking at the original myths featuring him and from there seek out the many places that he can still be found in art and story. As much as other things change, Lugh remains with us.

Searching for the Aos Sidhe

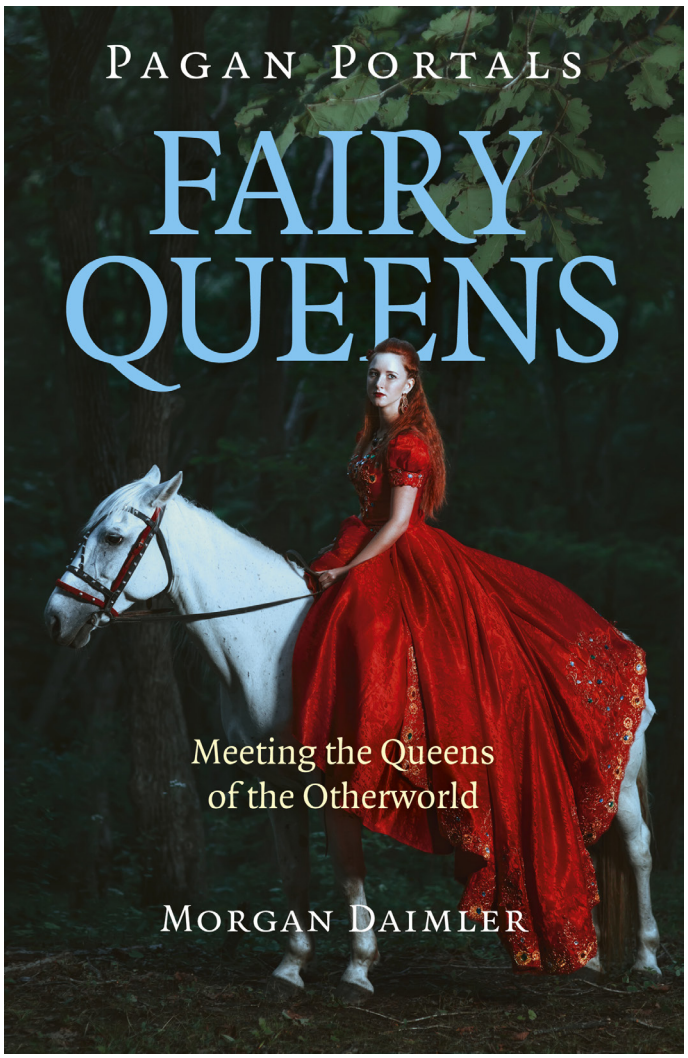
BY MORGAN DAIMLER

The subject of fairies is one that has gained a lot of popularity in the last several years, not only in general but also in specific as different named types of fairy beings come to prominence. One of these is the Irish Aos Sidhe [pronounced ace shee] who have gained increasing notoriety across fiction, academia, and various spiritual studies. And yet for all this increased attention the Aos Sidhe often remain poorly understood and hard to define. Are they fairies? Are they the old Irish gods? The human dead? Seeking to delve deeper into this subject often creates more confusion because of the abundance of good, bad, and just odd material to be found online. So, who then are the Aos Sidhe?

In modern parlance the common term used for these beings is sidhe, a shortened form of aos sidhe. Aos sidhe and the related Daoine Sidhe mean 'people of the fairy mounds'; sidhe is both a noun meaning fairy mounds and an adjective used for anything fairylike or Otherworldly. Because of this, although sidhe is used as a kind of slang just to mean the beings within the hill, it is often seen referring to the place the Aos Sidhe live but also features in compound terms like bean sidhe [fairy woman] or cú sidhe [fairy hound]. This can cause some confusion with people who see the word sidhe and assume it means the beings when it means the hills, so context is often important. There is some ongoing debate about whether the English word fairy is the best option to translate sidhe but it has been used this way for hundreds of years now and is firmly established both in vernacular use and in dictionaries. All of this may seem a bit tedious but it is important in starting to understand who the Aos Sidhe are to understand the meaning of the term in Irish.

So, Aos Sidhe means people of the fairy mounds, but why are they called that? The simple answer is that they are, indeed, people of the fairy mounds and

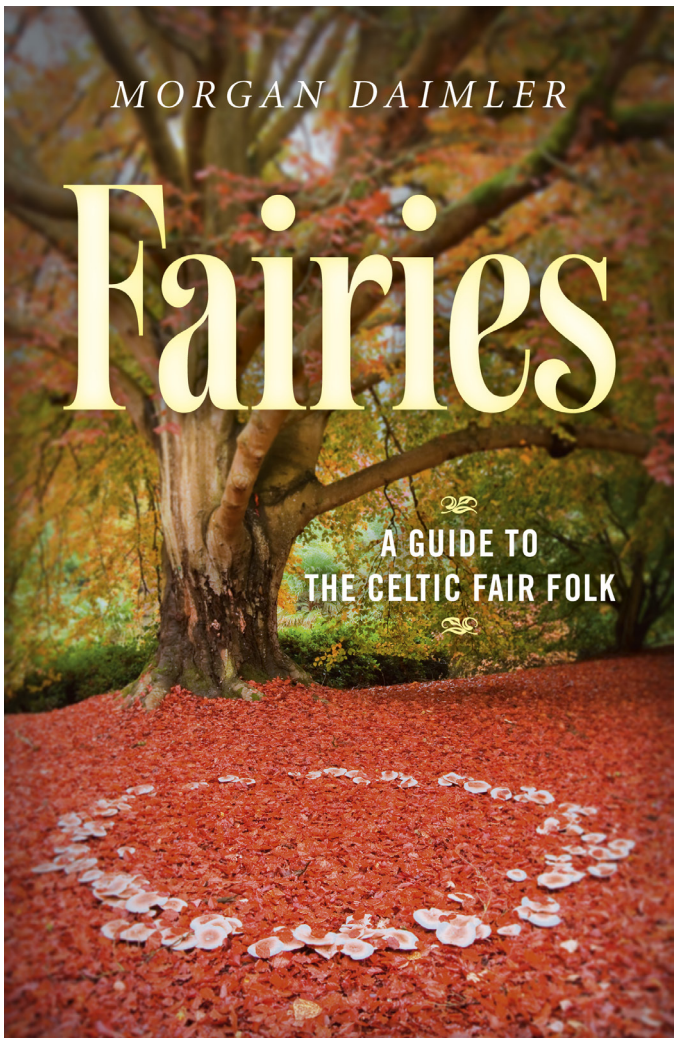
so the name is simply descriptive. But as with anything on this subject it's more complicated than that, if only because not all of the Aos Sidhe are associated with hills or mounds at all. In fact we see many stories that connect these beings to magical islands and some, such as with the Slua Sidhe, that are found in the air. So it isn't necessarily the literal hill or mound that matters but the wider concept attached to that of an entrance to the Otherworld. Are they the people of the fairy hills? Yes. But in a wider context they are the people of the Otherworld and that is the best way to understand the concept I think.



We are told in several stories that the Tuatha De Danann were defeated by the Gaels and went into the sidhe, the fairy mounds, and became the Aos Sidhe, the people of the fairy mounds. This leads many people to directly equate the two groups but it's a bit more complicated than that. While it's true that the Tuatha De Danann went into the fairy hills and became people of the mounds, it isn't true that they were the first ones there or indeed the only ones there. We have several references to the 'Riders of the Sidhe' existing before the Tuatha De Danann went into the sidhe, and we have a couple of sources which tell us that when that happened it was Manannán mac Lir, already king of the Otherworldly island of Emhain Abhlac, who taught the Tuatha De how to live in the Otherworld. While the Tuatha De Danann are among the Aos Sidhe we also find stories of many other types of beings – the Each Uisce, the Púca, the Rón – across folk belief all of whom exist in the nebulous realm of the Otherworld. There are also some among the Aos Sidhe who were once human, either stolen away by the sidhe at some point or thought to have died and this adds another layer of complexity to the topic. When we look across the breadth of source material we find not one simple answer to who the Aos Sidhe are but a range of possibilities all rooted in various beliefs.

Speaking of sources, we have references to the Aos Sidhe in Irish material as far back as we have written material in the Irish, approximately the 9th century with the text itself – the Echtra Condla – dated several centuries earlier by linguists. Not only do the Aos Sidhe appear in the oldest material but they continue forward into the present day, traced across a millennium and

more of mythology and folklore. We find mentions of the people of the fairy mounds in the great Irish epic the Táin Bó Cúailgne, in the 16th century story of the Fate of the Children of Tuireann, and in the tales of Fionn Mac Cumhal and the Fianna, most notably the famous tale of Niamh and Oisín. And stories of these beings abound in the folklore of the 19th and early 20th century, as well as 20th and 21st century folk belief. They are a consistent thread across belief from the beginning of written sources to today, and have left a deep mark in literature, poetry, and personal accounts.



Are they fairies? This may be one of the most pivotal questions today as the way fairies are understood becomes increasingly niche and specific and moves away from the older and current understanding of the Aos Sidhe. Fairies, unfortunately in my opinion, are often envisioned as tiny, winged, and largely powerless while in contrast the Aos Sidhe are human-seeming – at least when they choose to be – wingless, and powerful. Powerful enough that a great deal of folk material is aimed at warding against them or addressing harm they have caused. As mentioned above the term sidhe is often translated as fairy and in Ireland the two terms are used interchangeably by many people, however this is used with the cultural context of who and what the Aos Sidhe are. Outside that context equating the two can create confusion between the Irish idea of the powerful, dangerous beings of the Otherworld and the modern twee idea of sprite-like fairies. So this question, like the others has a layered answer: yes they are fairies in the sense of what English term is the closest equivalent, but no they aren't in the sense of what some people might imagine a fairy is.

The Aos Sidhe are a complicated subject, as anything would be whose history stretches across 1500 years. They are the people of the fairy mounds who may live in those hills or in the air or sea or islands. They are the old Irish gods except the ones who aren't and never were, the ones that are entirely of the Otherworld or the ones that were born human. They are fairies, but the sort of fairies that can look very human and who can bless or destroy a human's life with their magic. They are a diverse group that is often treated homogenously except when they aren't. And if that seems confusing then you are beginning to understand them.

Part III

Irish Translations

Tales of the Tuatha De Danann

Volume 1

BY MORGAN DAIMLER

I wanted to include this because it has the fascinating phrase 'Tong a toing mo tuath' – "I swear the oath of my people" which appears across the stories and seems to be a common oath taking motif. It is a piece of a wider tale about three Ulster warriors fighting over who is the greatest champion among them and therefore entitled to the hero's portion at feasts. Because Conchobar didn't want to make the decision and risk the wrath of the other two he sent all three to Medb and Ailill, effectively putting them on the spot to make the decision. Medb eventually does so, after a series of trials not included here, but rather than announcing it and angering them herself she sends them all back to Ulster, each with a cup of different value. Only when they get back and publicly compare cups do they realize who has been named the champion.

The Irish text was transcribed from the 1884 Irische Texte mit Übersetzugen und Wörterbuch.

Luid iarom Ailill ina arucul folet fri scrutuin a mbrethaigthi & domber a druimm fri fraigid & ni ba saim a menma & ba difficulty les an dail donfáinec & ni rochodail & ni roloingti co cend tri laa & teora n-oidqi, conid ann ismbert Medb: 'Is milaechda' 'no tái', ol si.

Ailill went afterwards [to his] private apartments to ponder his judgement and with his back against the interior wall and had no rest in his mind and was in difficulty seeking relief to this problem and without sleep and without eating to the end of three days and three nights, and thereafter spoke Medb: "martial prowess" "or a cup," she said.

Dotrae suas lasodain an cuach ndercoir & en do liic logmair for a lár & cutraime hi sula di draccain, dotnacatar Ulaid uili im Concubar mac Nessa. "Is me ierom dligius a curadmir, mina brister fior fer form."

"Cotmidium uili", ol Concubar & Fercus & ol maithi Ulad uili, "is let an curadmir a brith n-Ailellai."

He [Cu Chulainn] rose up then with the pure-gold cup and birds of precious stones on the middle and two dragon-stones the size of his eyes, he said to all the men of Ulster with Conchubar mac Nessa, "Mine then by right the warrior's portion, unless they break fair play."

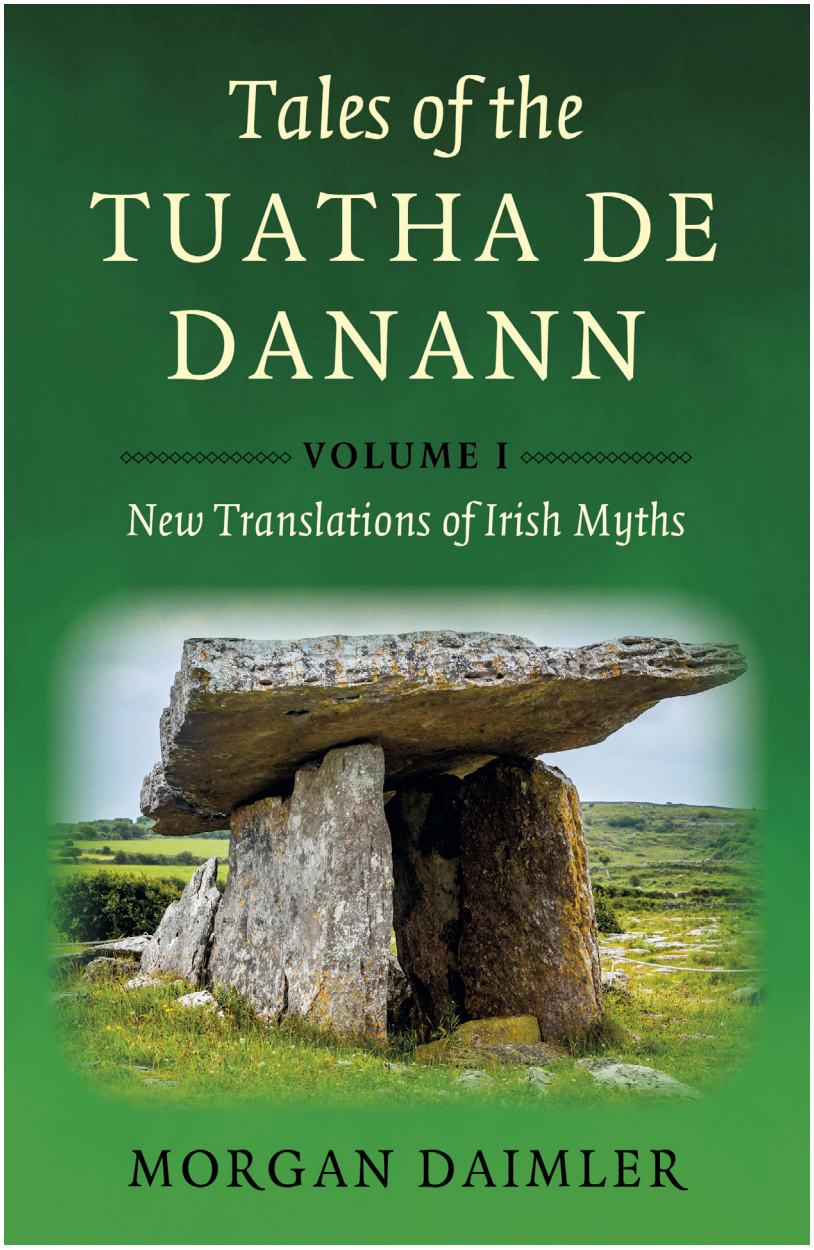
"To you we all judge it", said Conchubar and Fergus and said the good men of Ulster, "and the warrior's portion has been decided by Allil."

'Tong a toing mo tuath', or Loegairi Buadach & ol Connall, 'ni cuach cin crec dit an cuach tucuis. In rusboi di hsetaibh & di moinibh it hseulba, tucuis airi di Ailill & Meidb, ar na ructha dou bhag it cend, na tarta in curadmir di neoch aili ar do bheluib.'

'Tong a toing mo tuath', or Connall, 'ni ba lat, & ni ba breth an breth donucad ann, & ni berai an curadmir.'

"I swear the oath of my people," said Loegairi Buadach and said Connall, "any cup you have is a plunder taken not the cup given away. You have been bestowed it [because] from your treasure and possessions, you have given to Ailill and Medb, so that the giving of this declaration is the result, the warriors portion yours alone."

"I swear the oath of my people", said Connall, "this thing will not stand, and it is no justice the judgement given there, and any judgement of the warriors portion."



Tales of the Tuatha De Danann

Volume 2

BY MORGAN DAIMLER

This piece dates to between 900 and 1200 CE and explains how a particular family was founded. I've included it because it is an interesting piece and discusses both the kingship structure of ancient Ireland as well as including the protagonist's adventures in Scotland among the Picts. I also thought the references to witches were interesting and worth sharing as manuscript material rarely includes much detail on witches.

Irish text is sourced from Bodleian Library MS. Laud 610, fo. 98a 1–99b; any errors in transcription are entirely my own.

Fedelm ingen Moethaire de Chorco Che, ind aimmit, muimme Chonaill Chuirc maic Luigthig. Fíu ind aimmit hi tig in righ Luigthig ind aidchi genair Corc. Bolce banbretnach a mathair di Bretnaib. Banchánte. Tobert ailges forsind rig im fheis laiss. Is de conbreth Corc mac Luigthig. Laer Derg immurgu ainm a muimme. Is de ba Corc mac Láre & dogairther Hui maic Láre. Fíu ind aimmit occ in draide ind rig hi Femun, airm hi fuil Fertai Chonaill.

Fedelm daughter of Moethaire of Corco Che, the witch, [was] foster-mother of Conaill Corc son of Luigthig. The witch was in the house of king Luigthig the night Corc was born. Bolce Banbretnach from Britain was his mother. A female satirist. She put a poet's-request on the king to sleep with him. It is from this Corc son of Luigthig was conceived. Laer Derg was the name on his foster-mother. He was then Corc son of Lare and [so] the Hui mac Lare are called. The witch was with the druid of the king at Femen, the place where the mound of Conaill is.

Intan andesses a mathair for Curc focheird a mmac for foesam Fedelme na h-aimmiti & is hí nodnalt fair. Im theigeth la h-ammite. Dlighthir camrud in n-aidchi n-aili. Foluigi a mac fo an tellug fon talam. Dotiagat na h-aimmite hi tech. Asbeir oenne: 'Ní cuilliu acht fuile foa chaireu.' Bruinnith in tene forsin mac. Conloisc a hó. Is de ba corc Corc mac Luigthig. Imaicci fer spirdo laim Chuirc la muimme a lla n-aill asbeir fris: 'Tofuasilcea cimmidi nach ait indaaiccither & inidchuimser. Día

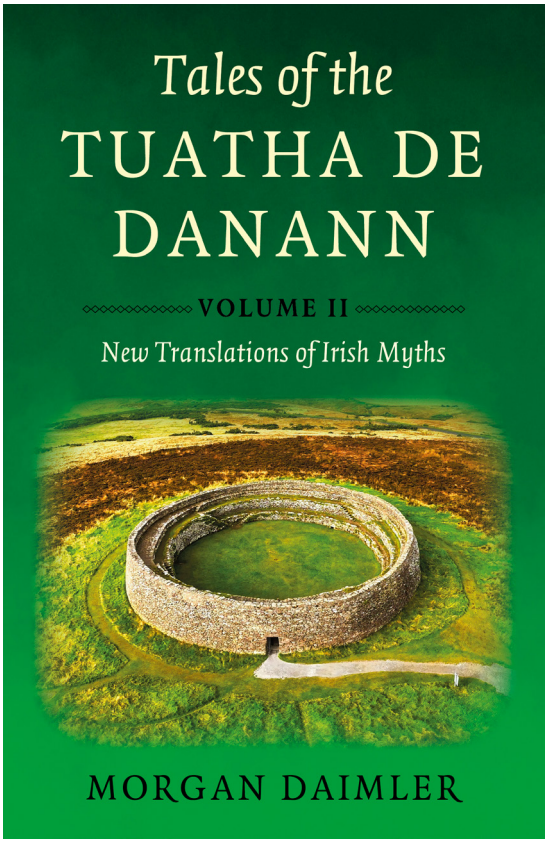
When his mother brought forth Corc she set her son under the protection of Fedelm the witch and it is she who sheltered him. She went accompanied by witches. Shelter is claimed the next night. She hid her boy under the hearth beneath the earth. The witches came into the house. One said: "I don't exclude but you who are under the cauldron". The fire springs forth towards the boy. His ear is burned. So that crimson is Corc son of Luigthig. A diviner examined Corc's hand with his foster-mother the next day and he said to him:

n-déne, bid amra do chenél & fortabiado h-ainm. Is and ata do h-ordan cia dogné.'

"You will release prisoners any place you see [them] and are able to. If you do so, your descendants will be famous and your name. It is there that your pre-eminence will be made."

Is andsin tra ba rí h-Éirenn Crimthann mac Fidaig. Ni fargbai dano claind. Ba macdalta doside Corc mac Luigthig. Da bráthair a n-da n-athair. Dligis Crimthann sesca bo oc crích Lagen hic fur Maige n-Ailbi. Foidis Crimthann Corc n-uad do thobach na borroime. Luid Corc co fairnic i r-Raigniu. Dáil móir and im Gruibni cimmith. Fofuaslaice Corc di buaib Crimthain. Consela Gruibni ind-Albain. Fofuaslaice da chimmith atherruch hi crich Lagen di buaib Crimthain beus. Birt indalani lais & anais alaile fri cuingith neich imbi co tisad Corc darithise co tudchissed laiss. Goet side di h-éis Chuirc. Gontit nói láich décc dia fine. Asrenair h-éricc már dossom ind .i. fiche echsrian & fiche bó cach fir do Churc. Dobeir Corc tri fichti bó do Chrimthan. Fodáli Corcc inna h-echsrianu & in n-éiricc olchena do láthib Aurmuman. Doluith asennath format do Chrimthan fris. Cossaitid ben Chrimthain arna fuair coiblige Chuirc. Fúite ind-Alpain co rrig Cruthentuathe doa bas & scribtha a h-amles isin scíath tria h-ogam fortgithe na fitir nech acht Crimthann & rí Cruithentúathe.

It was indeed when the king of Ireland was Crimthann15 son of Fidaig. He had not left, moreover, children. A fosterling to him was Corc son of Luigthig. Two brothers were their two fathers. Crimthann had a right to sixty cows in the territory of Leinster in Maige Ailbi. Crimthann sent Corc to collect the cattle-tribute. Corc went until he met them in Raigne. A great court [was] there around Gruibne the prisoner. Corc set him free with the cows of Crimthann. Gruibne departed for Scotland. He set free two prisoners again in the territory of Leinster with the cows of Crimthann. One went with him and the other remained against anyone asking after him until Corc should come back so that he could go with him. He was killed after Corc [left]. He was killed by nineteen warriors of a family. A great compensation was given for him, that is twenty bridles and twenty cows [for] each man to Corc. Corc gave sixty cows to Crimthann. Corc dispensed the bridles and the rest of the compensation to the warriors of Aurmuman. At last Crimthann became jealous of him. Crimthann's wife stirred [this] up because she couldn't get copulation with Corc. He was sent to Scotland to the king of the Pictish-people to be killed and a false charge was written in his shield through hidden Ogham which no one knew but Crimthann and the Pictish-people's king.

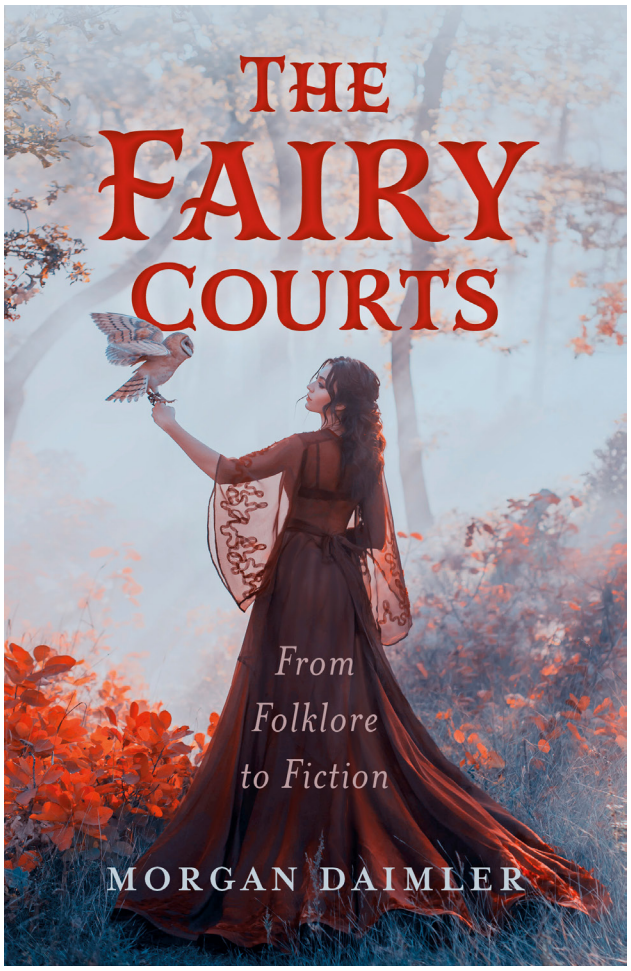


Part IV
Fairy

Humans and the World of Fairy

BY MORGAN DAIMLER

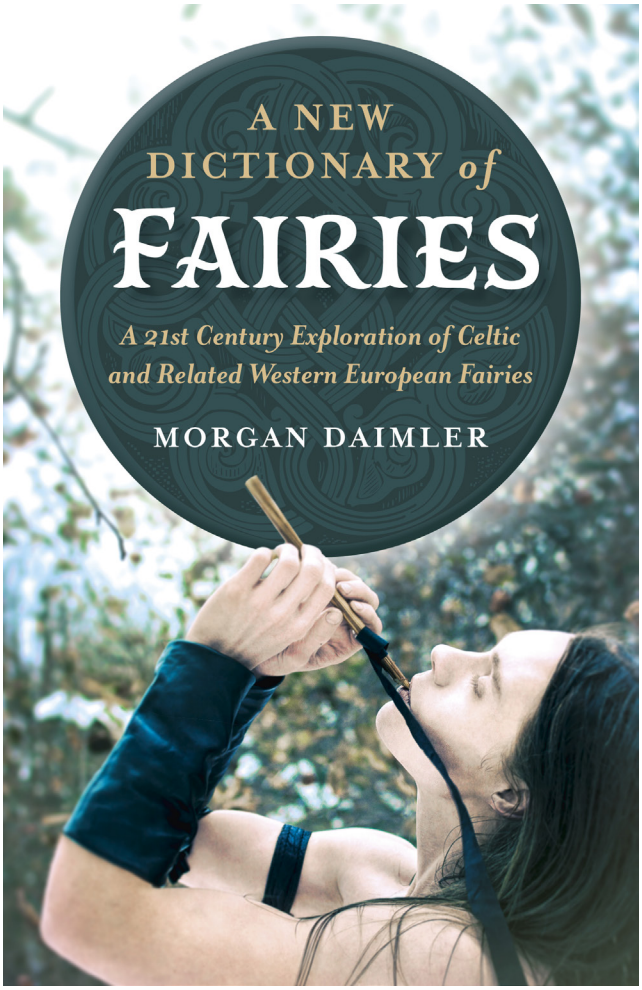
Stories of fairies and their world can be found across the last thousand years in Ireland, the UK, and France, often centered on a human's interaction with a specific fairy or group of fairies. Some stories expand beyond this to also include human interaction with the world that these beings come from, whether that interaction is voluntary or not. The world of Fairy is always, explicitly or implicitly, the backdrop to fairy stories, the place from which these beings come and to which they can return – sometimes with a human in tow. To understand fairies then we must understand their world and how human interactions with it affect us.



Today when we talk about fairies we often focus primarily on the individual beings, the ones who people might have encounters with in the human world or who populate the stories and folk tales that people share. But ultimately we can't separate these beings from their world, something that is reflected by the homonyms – fairy and Fairy – that we use for each, and by the history of the terms themselves. Before we had the word fairy, meaning the individual being, we had the word Fairy meaning the world, a place of enchantment and magic which existed near to but separate from the human world. This place later lent its name to anything with a similar nature, anything that was enchanting and magical, and eventually came to be used to describe the beings believed to live in that world. The word for the place came first, and our understanding of the beings reflected our understanding of the place; this is true in Irish as well where the word sidhe meant (and still means) Otherworldly mounds or hills and was connected to the beings, the aos sidhe [people of the sidhe]

who were believed to live there. It is impossible to truly separate the two from each other, the world and the beings who exist in it.

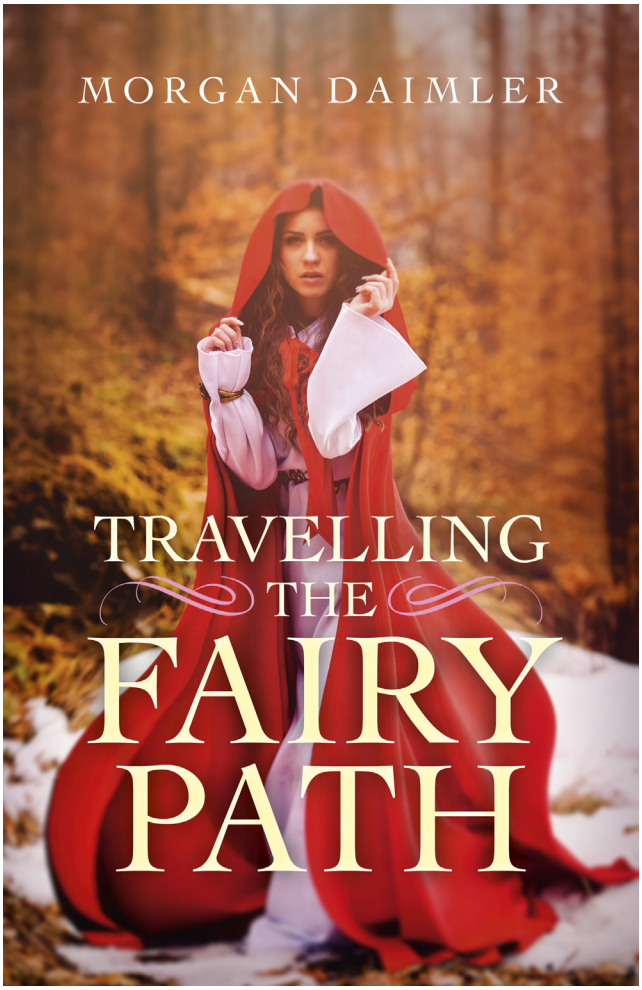
The oldest Irish language story we have that features the Good Folk dates to the 9th century in writing and at least a few hundred years further back based on the language used. Beveridge, author of *Children Into Swans*, even speculated that the story might go as far back as the 5th century CE. While it doesn't describe the land of Fairy in detail, or in fact at all, the place is a key aspect of the story. A fairy woman comes from magical islands which have 'sidhe mór' [large fairy hills] to Ireland in order to woo and win a human prince and bring him back with her. She does this, and after sailing off in a boat into the west the two are never seen on earth again. This is a common theme we find across the following centuries into today, that the fairies can and will lure people away – if not outright steal them – to add those humans to the population of Fairy. Why they do this we don't know for certain, but that they do it is established across a range of stories.



The idea of humans taken into Fairy is a common one across cultures, but it is only one way that a human might find themselves in that world. There are also stories of people who wander accidently out of the human world and find themselves not only encountering fairy beings but also realizing that they are well and truly not on earth anymore. In Welsh myth the human Pwyll followed his hounds chasing a deer through mist and into the world of Annwn, while in Irish myth the High King Conn had a somewhat similar experience when he and his men were encompassed in mist and taken into the Otherworld. Finally there are some stories of people who made their own way into Fairy, sometimes by following specific methods and other times by more literally following the fairy host itself. In the *Ballad of Childe Rowland* the protagonist enters Fairy by walking three times counterclockwise around a church, for example, while in *Sir Orfeo* the king follows a group of fairies back to their home. In the *Adventures of Nera*, and Irish myth, Nera enters the Otherworld by joining a fairy procession as it goes into a sidhe.

Those who find themselves in Fairy,

willingly or not, find a place that is in some ways like the human world and in other ways very different. Stories describe forests and fields, castles and towns, rivers and wells, all of which are much like their earthly equivalents. And yet Fairy is also a deeply foreign place. It is said in various sources that there is no sun nor moon there, and that the lighting seems to come from an unknown, diffuse source. The *Ballad of Thomas the Rhymer* claims that all blood shed on earth flow in the rivers and streams of Fairy, and in a similar vein *Sir Orfeo* described both living fairy beings and a wide range of dead humans (each still bearing the marks of their death) in the castle of the fairy king. Some Irish myths talk of monstrous animals that exist in the Otherworld and wreak havoc on earth, but other Irish myths talk of Fairy as a place of peace that is free from violence or sickness. The picture that forms as we look across all of these sources is a place of contradictions, where life and death exist side by side, and where the impossible is possible. It is a place that is full of and in many ways defined by magic.



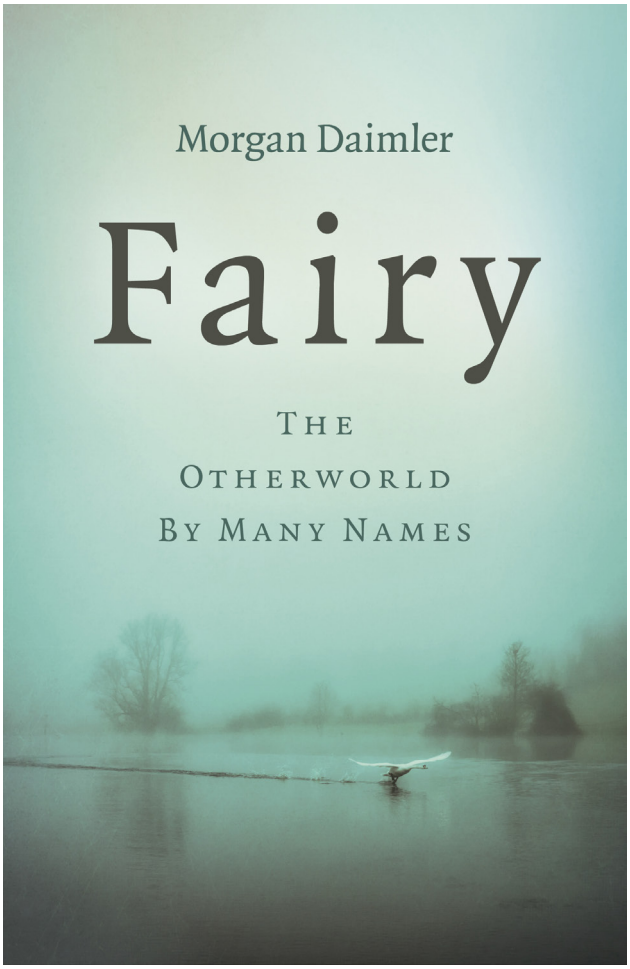
As wonderous as the land of Fairy can be it's not without its dangers, particularly for humans. It can be overtly dangerous of course, and we certainly have stories of humans killed there, but its risks can also be more subtle and more insidious. Those who enter may not be able to leave again, and those who are taken may end up spending eternity longing for the world they lost. And yet those who go to Fairy and come back may also pine away with longing for that world, as its beauty sinks into their souls and calls them to return. It is a place that leaves its mark on those who encounter it, and all who experience it are changed by it.

Fairy and fairies captivate human imaginations and, perhaps, more literally captivate humans. It is a place that tempts us with our greatest desires, that dances through our dreams, but which also traps us and holds us in its timelessness until all we knew or loved in life has been washed away. Despite that danger and despite that temptation, it is a world that remains embedded in our collective subconscious, a place that is equal parts paradise and prison but which is intwined within our souls. No matter how our world evolves, Fairy stays with it, tethered to it and to us.

The Otherworld and the Tides of the Year

BY MORGAN DAIMLER

The Otherworld, known by many names including Fairy and Elfhame, has been mentioned in myth and folklore as far back as at least the 7th century, possibly earlier. We have a wide array of stories of people encountering beings from this world, called fairies in English, as well as of people who travel to or are brought into the Otherworld. Many of these tales are connected to or relate to specific times or dates in the human world, suggesting that there may be a deeper connection between the Otherworld and earth, one that goes beyond a superficial understanding of fairies' needing humans for various purposes and instead may have deeper cosmological significance. What are these seasonal tides and how do they join the Otherworld and human worlds?



The Otherworld is a place that both fascinates and sometimes terrifies people, a place that is adjacent to the human world but apart from it. It goes by many names across Western Europe and has been understood in different ways across both cultures and time. For some it is a near paradise, a place without illness, aging, death, or conflict. For others it is a place that is in most ways just like the human world, full of feasting, trysting, fighting, and work, but in which magic is a powerful and palpable force. In all the various understandings of this realm however one thing remains constant, and that is the intrinsic connection between that world and our world, and the way that they two worlds seem to interlock with each other while remaining distinct. It is possible for beings from the Otherworld to cross into the human world, and in some less common cases for humans to cross into the Otherworld on their own, and across stories there are certain times

of year or seasonal celebrations that seem to facilitate this or represent points when the two worlds are more closely aligned.

By its nature the Otherworld might seem separated from the human world in several vital ways, including the seasons as they pass. There is certainly some folk belief that supports this, in that it's widely acknowledged that time moves differently in the Otherworld with days there sometimes being years here, and also in that some stories claim the Otherworld's seasons are inverted from the local human ones. In the Echtra Nera, for example, the eponymous protagonist enters the Otherworld, makes a new life, there, marries, and is, eventually, given a warning that his own people in the human world will be destroyed by the people of the Sidhe on a specific date. Nera then decides to leave his new life and family to warn his comrades and his wife offers him a spring bloom to bring back to prove his tale, since it is the beginning of winter in the human world. This can be interpreted as the seasons in the Otherworld being opposite human ones, but we could also perhaps look at it as an example of fairy magic at work, with Nera's wife producing the flower because it is something that couldn't exist in the human world at that time. In that case the story isn't telling us that the seasons are reversed but extolling that power of the Aos Sidhe over their world, and perhaps our own.

We can also find many stories that seem to show a strong connection between the Otherworld and human seasons. In Irish folk belief it was said, up through at least the middle of the 20th century, that the Good Folk were owed a portion of the harvest in a seasonal tithe to them for their either allowing crops to flourish or aiding them in growing. This belief inherently implied that the Aos Sidhe were aware of human seasons and when the harvest would be due, and that they both expected to be given a portion each year and also knew when that portion should be offered. In a similar way in Scottish folklore found around Selkirk there was an idea that fairies paid a tithe to Hell, as they were tenants of the Devil who rented the Otherworld from him; this rent had to be paid either each year or once every seven years on Halloween, again implying that the Good People understood the progression of human seasons and time and that they, and their world, were bound to that schedule. One should note that this was also the time in that area when human

tenants were expected to pay rent to their landlords, so that the Otherworld here was directly mimicking the human world. It was also a wider belief that on Beltane and Samhuinn the fairies would ride out in grand processions, and in some Scottish and Irish belief it was said the Good Folk moved their homes from one fairy hill to another at these specific times every year, which was why a human had a greater chance of encountering them then.

In Irish folklore we find stories of the Good Folk tied to both the hinges of the year, at Bealtaine and Samhain, and also to Lughnasadh. At Lughnasadh it is said that the Aos Sidhe fight with each other in great battles which can cause thunderstorms; the winner gains the best harvest for their province or county while the loser is left with a thin harvest in their own. In this view the success or failure of the human harvest directly mirrors the abundance or lack thereof within the Otherworld communities in those areas, showing that the overlap between the Otherworld and human world is complex but also vital for the fairies. They are not only connected to humans, stealing them to increase their own numbers and relying on them in various ways, but the Otherworld itself is bound to and by the human world that it overlaps with.

What then should we conclude about the tides of the year and the Otherworld? Metaphysically tethered to each other, the two realities seem to act like a boat tied to a dock, moving closer and further apart across time, with specific times in the human world acting like ropes binding them together. Time is a fluid concept in the Otherworld and a concrete one in the human world, yet these seasonal points and celebrations act as anchors between the two, holding them together and pulling them closer at certain times. While humans struggle to navigate this flow, often caught up in it or destroyed by it in stories, the Good Folk appear to have an understanding of it which allows them to move freely between their world and the human world without being lost in time. Perhaps one aspect of this is their understanding of how these seasonal anchors work; while humans observe them and can see the pattern of connection it may be that the beings of the Otherworld can influence them to some degree or have enough of an understanding of them to navigate them where humans do not. But ultimately we can say that the patterns exist and that these tides of the year bind the two worlds in significant ways.

Fairies in a Modern World

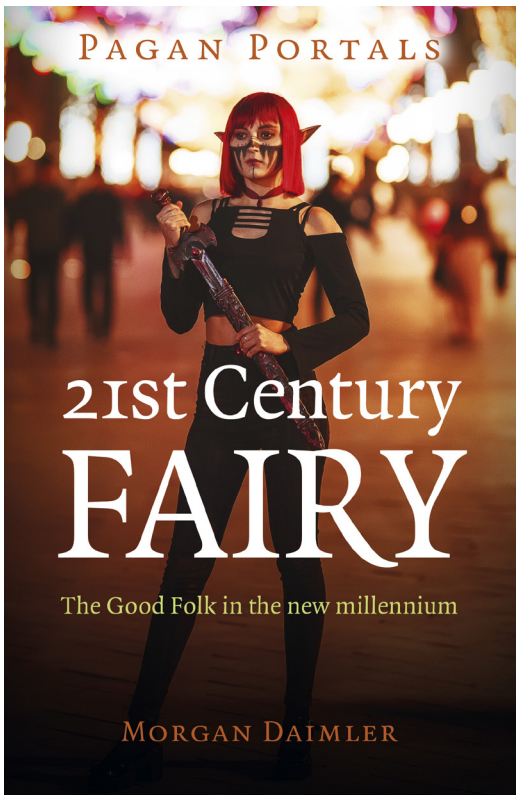
BY MORGAN DAIMLER

It's common in artwork and fiction today for fairies to be depicted in various anachronistic ways, as if they were beings from the past who had somehow sidestepped through time into our modern world. They dance across paintings in medieval dresses and battle in modern fiction wearing plate armour and wielding swords, as if they exist in defiance of the last several hundred years of passing time. They embody, in many ways, the nostalgia and enchantment of a romanticized past, the simpler time that some people long for as a cure for the modern world's problems. But is this truly what fairies today are? Have they been caught in a specific time period, frozen there while humanity marches forward? Or are they evolving and changing with us, adapting to the world that humans shape?

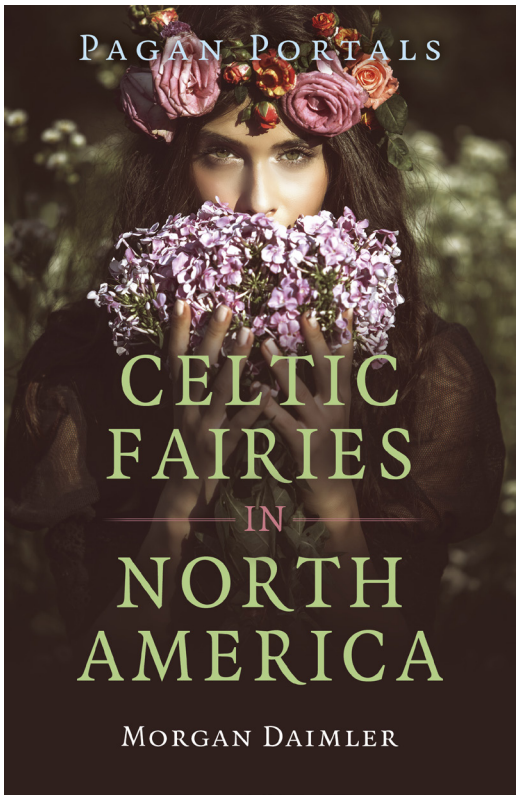
For as long as there have been stories recorded in Western Europe we have tales of fairies. They have been with us seemingly since the beginning and they persist no matter how many times they have been declared gone and forgotten. It should be no surprise then that they are still found across all media and anecdotal accounts in the 21st century, perhaps even more strongly than before. The enchantment of the world of Fairy and the allure of the beings found within that world seem to be intrinsic to the human experience no matter how our technology changes or how complex our world becomes.

The view of fairies as existing frozen in a previous time period is actually a newer idea; up until the 20th century when fairies were described in stories or depicted in art they always appeared either contemporary to the narrator/artist or within a few generations. We find accounts of people who saw fairies and describe what would have been – to them – people wearing modern fashions, or as Yeats recounts in one story, fashions that were known in an

area during the person's grandparents' time. Reverend Robert Kirk, in his 1691 treatise in Scottish fairies, says plainly that the Good Folk wear the fashions of their human neighbours, changing what they wear to match whatever area they are in and that they speak the local languages even though they have a language of their own. Yet at some point in the 20th century it became an unwritten rule to depict fairies as beings of the past or as creatures of nature clad in leaves and flowers and that view has dominated over the last hundred years.



Perhaps now we view fairies through this particular lens, dressed in the past, because we have been told for hundreds of years that the fairies had left our human world, that we had driven them out. Despite their continuous presence in stories and anecdotes they are beings who have too often been relegated to past – rather than present – belief. Shifted into the past tense they come to embody the past itself even though they remain just as active as ever. And perhaps, because we expect them to appear in old fashioned clothes, they show up in such guises to humour us or play to our expectations. Like actors in fancy dress they give the audience, as it were, what they expect. We project our romantic ideas of an idyllic past onto fairies and so we create art and stories where they embody that, even though it often contradicts people's anecdotal accounts.



While there may be a wider narrative of anachronistic fairies, humans still experience fairies today and people's actual modern experiences of fairies run a wide range between the expected medieval knights to twee winged sprites to nearly human-like or even those beings that can pass as human. The 2018 Fairy Census, which can be found free online, offers a range of these experiences with fairies which show these beings contemporary to the humans they are interacting with and sometimes initially mistaken for human until they do or say something to give away their true nature. A young man put a video up online where he talks about a frightening experience he had with a fairy in the middle of a city; he initially mistook the fairy for a human man until the fairy started doing things

that were physically impossible, like appearing in front of him with no possible way of having arrived there. An account of late 20th century Welsh pixies says one convinced a midwife to go with him, by bus, to a wooded location to help a pixie woman give birth, offering a modern twist on the centuries old 'borrowed midwife' motif. A 1979 account dubbed the 'Wollaton Gnomes' involved several children seeing and subsequently playing with a group of beings they described as gnomes who travelled in small cars which appeared be foreign to but based on human technology. Across anecdotes and stories from the last fifty years we find fairies dressed in modern human clothes, fairies driving what at least look like cars, fairies riding the bus and fairies using human technology to their own advantage – all while still remaining true to the older stories which describe them.

As we move further into the 21st century seeing fairies in a new way, breaking out of this antiquated mould, might be essential to understanding them today. When we have a strong preconceived notion of fairies as archaic then we will be more likely to ignore possible experiences that don't fit the parameters we expect. And when we are expecting fairies to look like they stepped out of a history programme, act like extras in a Shakespeare production, and rely on older technology we will not only possibly miss out on potential interactions around us but we also limit our own ability to understand these beings. We allow our own biases to direct us, instead of being open to wider possibilities.

Fairies in the 21st century are complex beings who defy any easy descriptions. In some accounts they are exactly as mass media would paint them yet in others they are thoroughly modern beings, clad in jeans and t-shirts and using public transportation. People talk of fairies who muck up computers, who drain cell phone batteries, who can be seen by human eyes but don't appear on video. They are seen lurking in thoroughly modern fairs and are rumoured to haunt shopping malls. There are even stories of people encountering fairies in airports and chain coffee shops. They are consistently still here, defying those who relegate them to the past tense, appearing both to believers and unbelievers alike, seeming to delight in the confusion they can cause with their very modern interactions.

Our current concept of how fairies look is heavily shaped by art and fiction which paints images of beings that are held frozen in time, like insects in amber. We picture them speaking and acting like the fairies of Shakespeare or the elves of Lord of the Rings. This driving popular narrative shapes how many people imagine and understand fairies, and yet when we look at actual modern experiences we find an entire gamut of encounters that do sometimes include older styles of dress and behaviour but often feature beings wearing modern clothing and acting in modern ways. People's experiences of these beings, as often as not, defy the stereotypes that permeate our culture and when we stop and look at what people today are actually saying about their fairy encounters we find beings that seem to mimic human culture in all its diversity, complexity, and modernity.

If you were to see a fairy today it may indeed be a small sprite or a little ball of light – but it may also look like something very human, someone who moves without drawing much attention, but whose eyes glow or who can defy the laws of physics or who lacks a shadow. And maybe this is the ultimate camouflage for them, hiding in plain sight and letting a century of stories which paint them as creatures of the past protect them.

So I will leave you with this final thought: would you recognize a fairy if you met one?

Part V
Norse

Seidhr: Freya's Gift to the World

by Morgan Daimler

My spirit moves
Inside my skin
Seething, seething, seething
Breaks free, bursting
Out beyond flesh
Shifting, shifting, shifting
My shape changing
Wearing wings, wild
Soaring, soaring, soaring
Clothed in feathers
Clothed in light
Straining, straining, straining
Down to the roots
Of the tree, of the world
Searching, searching, searching
Questions echoing
Answers waiting
Seeing, seeing, seeing

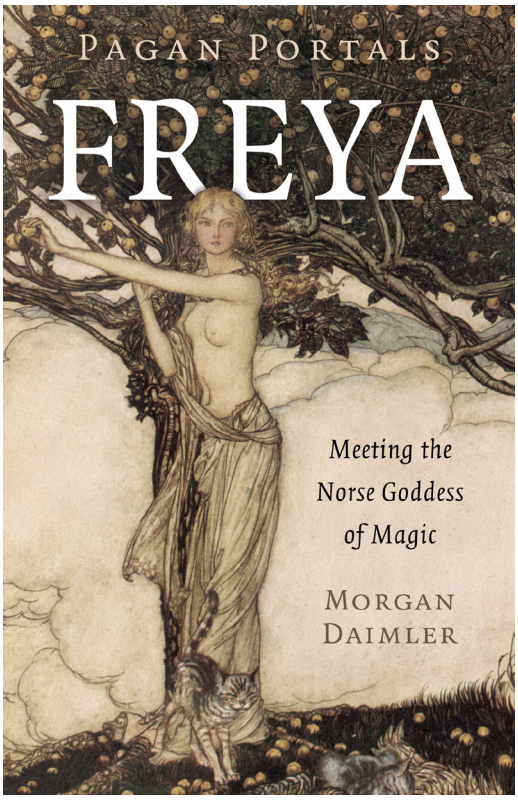
(Morgan Daimler, 2014)

Freya is a fascinating deity and one who has remained popular across time, a primal Vanic goddess who found a place among the civilized Aesir, a complex figure connected to fertility, sex, war, and magic. In particular Freya is associated with a kind of magic called seidhr, a practice that is both powerful and also somewhat controversial both in the pre-Christian heathen period and today, but which cements Freya's association with witches and more widely witchcraft. It is also, perhaps, one of the most profound things that Freya is said to have shared, a transformational power that she brought from her world and people to those outside.

Seidhr is a uniquely Norse approach to magic, although what we know of it today is reconstructed from hints in texts and archaeology. While it is referenced in various stories, details of the actual practice are scanty and mostly implied rather than explicitly given. The word itself is Norse and has an uncertain meaning, with one older theory favouring 'seething' while newer lines of thought tie it to a proto-Indo-European word for binding or tying; it is often simply translated as witchcraft, or less commonly as shamanism (I favour the witchcraft translation although neither is really a good English descriptor for what seidhr encompasses). According to Ynglinga Saga seidhr workers were said to be able to control the weather by stilling the ocean or turning the wind, could put out fires, shape shift by sending their spirit out in the form of an animal, could tell the future, could speak to the dead (a practice called utisetta or out-sitting) and could bring death, ill luck and illness, or life, good luck and health. Seidhr

could be practiced in various ways including trancework and chanting, sometimes referred to as galdr. The Voluspa mentions the seidhr worker's ability to influence the minds of other people and to use magic charms, and Eric the Red's Saga talks about spirit communication and oracular work. In Eric the Red's Saga a woman who practices Seidhr is said to have travelled from village to village, staying at wealthy farms, and conducting a ceremony to foretell the community's fate.

We know from the available material that seidhr was something of an outsiders practice, often equated in later material to witchcraft, and that it was primarily understood as a women's practice with men who worked seidhr seen as being ergi or 'unmanly', a term often associated with homosexuality. Despite this reputation it was a practice of both men and women and was also attributed to the god Odin. Seidhr itself was originally, according to the lore, a practice of the Vanic gods and in Anglo-Saxon sources was connected with the elves who had a form of magic called 'aelfsiden' that is very similar to the magic of seidhr performed by humans. This may suggest an interesting connection between elves and the Vanir more generally or at the least that the elves learned the art of this magic from them, if not from Freya herself. Seidhr generally had a questionable reputation (arguably as it still does today) in part for involving practices that can be seen as manipulative of other people to various degrees; possibly for this reason the oracular or predictive aspects of seidhr tend to be the most commonly discussed and emphasized today.

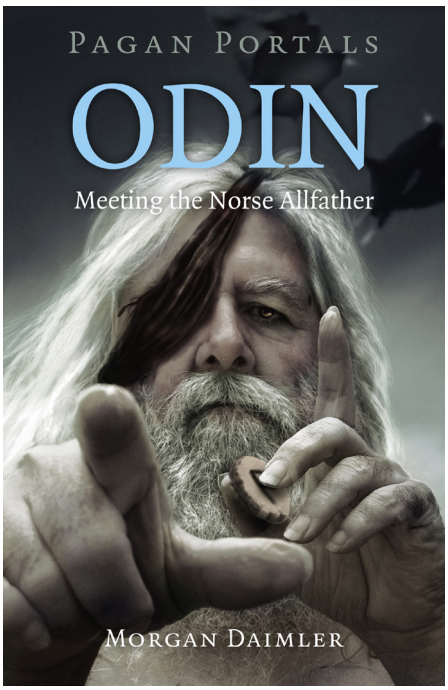


Oracular seidhr had been reconstructed and is practiced among some heathens across various modern communities. There are two main, very different, approaches to this although both involve the seidhr worker seeking to connect to spirits which can provide answers to questions. Those spirits often include the human dead as well as various deities. In one form the worker will gain the information by travelling out, in spirit, to a liminal space or to the gates of the afterlife (Helheim) while in the other the worker will call spirits to themself to answer questions. In both historic and modern practices seidhr workers doing this kind of predictive work would often work with others, for example in Erik the Red's Saga the seeress requires someone to chant special songs to draw the spirits to her so she can speak to them while in trance.

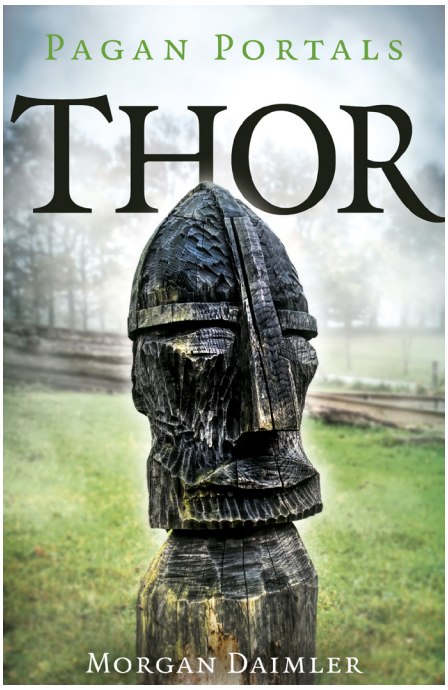
Another seidhr practice is called sjonhverfing, or "deceiving of the sight". This is a focused mental practice where you make others see or perceive what you want them to instead of what is really there. An example of this type of seidhr magic is seen in Eyrbyggja Saga where a seidhr worker tries to save her son who is being chased by a group trying to kill him by making the men chasing him see only a household object where the man is sitting. While the attempt ultimately fails it initially succeeds, with the men being deceived in the moment and leaving because they believe the woman is alone – oblivious to her son who is

right there in the room.

A final well known seidhr practice is utisetta, or sitting out. Utisetta is done to contact the spirits of the dead by sitting out on a grave or burial mound wrapped in a cloak. Utisetta in the lore could be very dangerous as it represented intentionally breaching the boundaries between the living and the dead, but could also offer many rewards, especially through new knowledge and prophecy, which the Norse believed could be given by the dead. There are various accounts of people approaching seers, including dead ones, through either this practice or a similar concept; we can see examples in Freya's journey to the dead Jotun seeress or in Odin's visit to the seeress who related to him the eventually end of the world.



For many people it is considered common knowledge today that Freya taught Seidhr to both the Aesir and to humans but as with most things the lore is a bit more complicated than that. Ynglinga Saga tells us that it was Freya who taught this form of magic to the Aesir, which is fairly straightforward. However, the idea that she taught humans as well, while fairly well known today, is less certain. There's nowhere in any story that explicitly says that, rather it's a being named Gullveig, later called Heidhr, who the Voluspa tells us went among humans practicing seidhr; however many scholars including Simek and Lindow have theorized that Gullveig/Heidhr was Freya under a different name, and so credit Freya with the actions attributed to the other named figures. Through this understanding we expand our view of Freya out into a deity who not only had this powerful form of magical practice but who shared it with other Gods (the Aesir) as well as among humans, especially human women.



Freya is a deity who is connected to much more than the popular views of her tend to look at, and her role as a practitioner of seidhr and as the one who taught this potent magic to others should be appreciated for the powerful act that it was. Seidhr is a transgressive practice, a form of magic that manipulates reality, pierces the veil between present and future, and draws the dead into the realm of the living or brings the living to the dead. Rather than keeping this power to herself or for her own people Freya chose to share it with others, both giving it to the Aesir who she had gone to live among and – as Heidhr – to travel the mortal world and share her knowledge and power with human women. This positions her very directly standing with human witches and empowering people in their own quest for magic and for greater control in their lives, making Freya a goddess who is both engaged with those who seek her as well as intriguing to those who study her.

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The Morrigan
Irish Paganism
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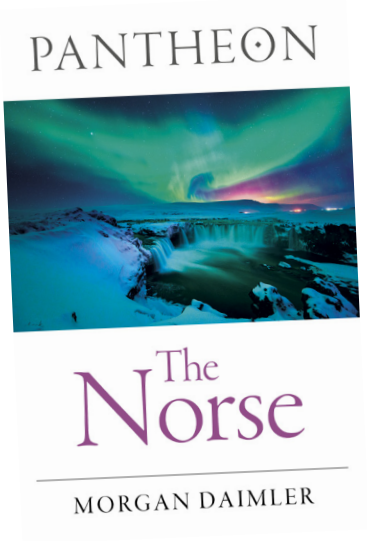

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The Wild Hunt
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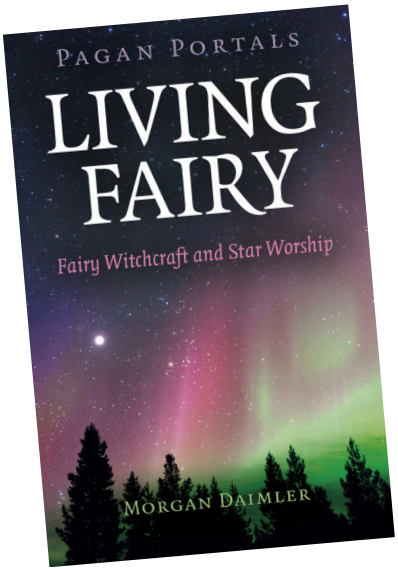

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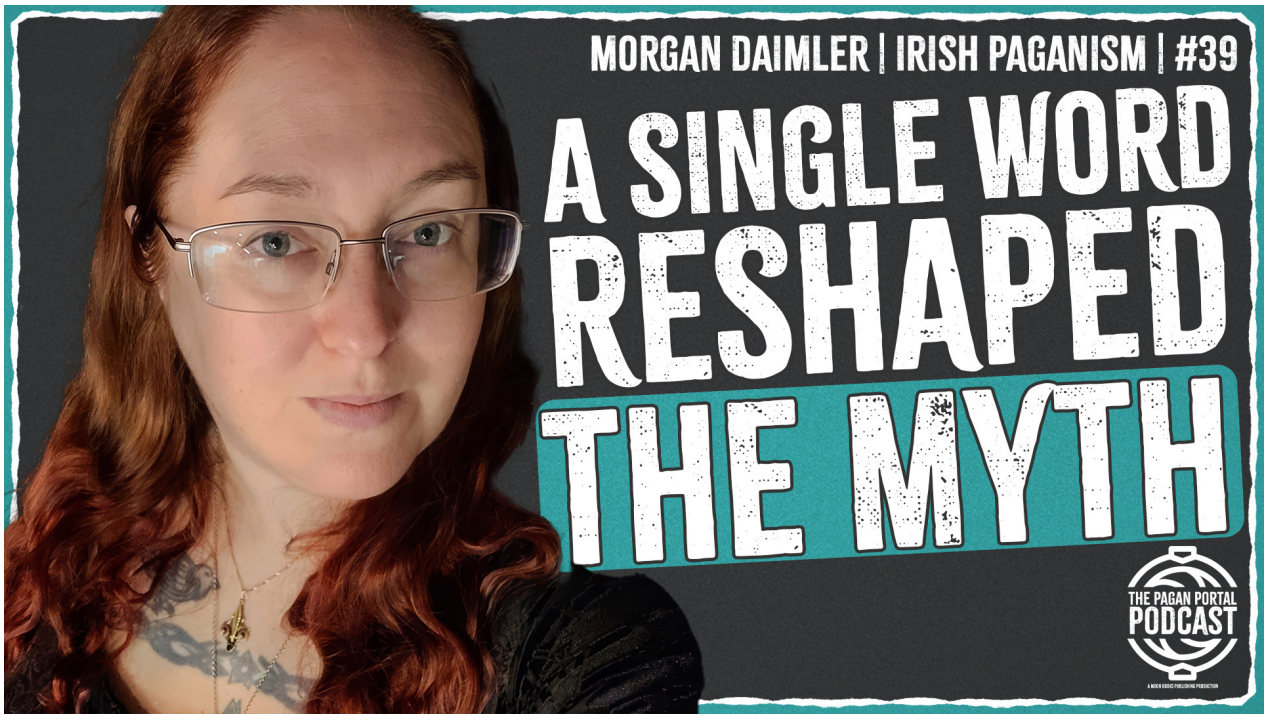

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