

## In Celebration of Morgan le Fay

I give my desires and dreams into Your  
keeping. By Air I create the seed.  
By Fire, I warm it.  
By Water, I nourish it. By Earth,  
I cause it to grow. From Spirit, I draw the power  
to make all things possible. Join me in celebration  
of the power of the Goddess.  
  
(maiden ritual)

With the introduction of Marion Zimmer Bradley's best-selling novel *The Mists of Avalon* into the vast collection of Arthurian Legend, there also came something that had received little attention throughout the literature--the woman. But perhaps that someone finally told the story from the woman's point of view should not come as such a surprise to us. Typically, the depiction of women in Arthurian Legend reflects the general attitude of the time period from which the work came. According to the *New Arthurian Encyclopedia*, "the idealized women of Arthurian literature reflect the social mentalities and sexual preoccupation of their eras" (524). Whereas in the twelfth through the fifteenth centuries, women (regardless of the romantic turn the literature had taken) were typically marginalized and often appeared dependent entirely on others. And if the character was by chance more predominant or given a more central role to the story, she suddenly became "otherworldly" or somehow mystical and therefore not of this world. Enter the great Morgan le Fay.

The problem with tracing any single character throughout the hundreds of years worth of literature is the subtle changes that each rendition introduced, not to mention that the collection itself is so vast it is nearly impossible to catalogue. However, through most of the literature, Morgan was considered the daughter of Igraine and Gorlois making her the half-sister to Arthur. Usually she is pitted against Arthur as his one major adversary, and is usually the mother of Mordred--the man destined to bring about the fall of Camelot. She is also considered the daughter of LeFay, a Welsh sea Goddess; indeed, the root of her name (*mor*) means sea and she was a sea Goddess standing where one must cross to reach the isle of the otherworld. She may very well have once been a Goddess of Glastonbury Tor which is sacred to Pagan ritual.

as a gateway to the otherworld.

The true origin of Morgan is yet to be defined, even the development of her name itself is still under consideration. But, as with most Arthurian characters, there are several trails leading us back to some character from Celtic mythology. In tracing her name, one theory equates her with Modron (from Welsh literature, the daughter of Avallach, wife of Urien, and mother of Owein). This name could have then been abandoned for Morgan later by the Bretons. But still, there are other references to a similar character by such names as "Morgne the goddess" (Gawain and the Green Knight) or even Morgain (Vulgate Lancelot). The idea that Morgan was typically the plotter of King Arthur's death easily equates her with the Morrigan (a Triple Goddess of Celtic myth) as both are generally thought of as the Goddess of Death.

#### The Morrigan

Over his head is shrieking

A lean hag, quickly hopping

Over the points of the weapons and the shields;

She is the gray-haired Morrigan.

(from the Tain Bo Guilagne)

The Morrigan, also known as the Morrigan, is a Triple Goddess consisting of the crone Goddesses depicting war, battle, death, and destruction. A Triple Goddess is worshipped in pagan cultures as eternal but in a continual state of flux. Like the moon which represents her, she remains the same yet shows a different face throughout her eternal cycle. She is the Maiden, Mother, and Crone. The Morrigan represents the Crone aspect of this Triple Goddess, which is represented by the old woman.

According to Celtic tradition, as they entered into battle, the Morrigan flew in shrieking overhead in the form of a raven or crow. Once the battle had ended the soldiers would leave the remaining dead on the field until dawn, in order for the Morrigan to claim her own trophies, their heads (note the crow gouging out the eyes of the man's head in the picture above).

What fate awaits King Arthur and his ever-present, usually problematic half-sister? We can only wait and see...

#### References and Related Odds and Ends

Loomis, Roger Sherman. Celtic Myth and Arthurian Romance, New York: Columbia University Press, 1927.

McCoy, Edain. Celtic Myth and Magic, St. Paul: Llewellyn Publications, 1995

"Women, Arthurian." The New Arthurian Encyclopedia. 1991

Additional information provided by: The Camelot Project

Celtic girl (top of page) lifted from: Whispering Trees

Celtic knotwork came from: theBodhran page

Final Morgan le Fay picture scanned from Camelot 3000, a "graphic novel" by Mike W. Barr and Brian Bolland.

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