

Morgan Le Fay

by Susa Morgan Black , FSA Scot.

Medieval Story

The contemporary stories of Morgan le Fay are based on Christianized versions found in the Medieval writings of the Vulgate and Malory. She is depicted as an evil and lusty enchantress who tricks her brother, good King Arthur, into an incestuous relationship with her, resulting in the unnatural birth of their son, Mordred. She tricks Arthur's wizard, Merlin, into divulging his magical secrets to her, then disposes of him inside the trunk of a tree, or a crystal cave. She sows the seeds of discontent with gossip against Lancelot and Queen Guinevere, steals the magical sword, Excalibur with its healing scabbard, plots the death of Arthur with her various lovers, and ultimately contributes to the dissolution of the Round Table. Yet, even in this version, Morgan was one of the three queens that retrieved Arthur's fatally wounded body from the Battle of Camlan on Salisbury Plain, and returned with him to the holy Isle of Avalon to heal him, for he is the Once and Future King, destined to return from the timeless fairy island when Britain is in need of him.

Marian Zimmer Bradley rescues Morgan le Fay from the Medieval sources, and tells the story from Morgan's own point of view, as recently seen in the excellent movie, *The Mists of Avalon*, based on her novel.

Celtic Story

Morgan was a Celtic Queen. One of the definitions of the name Morgan is "Great Queen" (Mohr Righan), which may have been an ancient royal title. The early Celts were matriarchal, and during the transition from matriarch to patriarchy, they went by Druidic tanist law, meaning the kingship was inherited by the King's eldest sister's son (according to Evangeline Walton's version of the Mabinogian). Mordred was the true heir to the throne by ancient law, not because he was Arthur's son, but because he was Arthur's nephew. (After all, if Guenevere had given birth, whose child would it have been - Arthur's or Lancelot's?) The Christian clerics, who supported the patriarchal law of primogenitor (direct inheritance from father to eldest son within the bonds of marriage), changed the facts of the story, making Mordred the product of an unholy, incestuous union between brother and sister in order to invalidate Mordred's legitimacy and destroy the remnants of the once powerful matriarchal system.

Celtic Triple Goddess

But Morgan is far older than the Medieval Arthurian legends. Her name appears in all Celtic lands - Ireland, Scotland, Wales, England, Mann, Cornwall, and Brittany. As far away as Italy, She is called Fata Morgana which describes the mirages seen near the Straights of Messina. Morgan's castle is said to be located under the water. I believe She is the one of the oldest Celtic Goddesses, who traveled with the Celtic people across the continent of Europe. There is even a vampire character in Polish folklore called "Morgano" which may be a distant remnant of Her.

Morgan is the third aspect of the sacred triad of the Triple Goddess, the essence of the powerful Crone, Warriress, Seductress. Although She is an elder Goddess, she is still magnificent in appearance - often beautiful but frightening. In many of the tales, such as Sir Gawaine and the Green Knight, she can change her appearance from an ancient hag to a beautiful maiden.

Irish Goddess of War and Death

In Ireland, She is called Morrighan (or Morrighu), the Goddess of Battles and Death. She is a Queen among the Tuatha de Danaan. She is a shapeshifter who can take the shape of a raven or crow at battle sites, where She is Chooser of the Slain. In legend, She trained and armed some of Ireland's greatest warriors, including Chuchulain. She is said to have mated with the Irish God Dagda while straddling a river. The sensuous Battle Goddess seduced many Irish heroes and Gods. The Morrigan is also known as the Washer at the Ford or the Washer of Shrouds. She is seen washing the armor of warriors in a stream, wailing and prophesying their deaths. (Many of Her legends take place near water). She is associated with the bean sidhe (banshee), the wailing women who prophesy death and sometimes take the shape of ravens. The Morrigan was also a Seer, who prophesied the future.

She is sometimes called the Triple Goddess – with Her other aspects being Badb, Macha, and Nemain.

Scottish Tales

The treacherous whirlpool in the Inner Hebrides, commonly known as the Corryveckan, is also known as "Morrigan's Cauldron".

Manx Tale

In Manx, there is a legend of a mermaid who lived in a creek on the Isle of Man. A young boatman fell in love with her and brought her an offering of apples, even planting an apple tree near the shore for her. It is said that he eventually left, and she wandered the shores looking for him in vain. Apples and Mermaids are both signatures of Morgan's many folktales.

Lady of the Lake

In Breton, France, Morgens are sea-women, water spirits or mermaids. The name Morgan has also been translated as "of the sea" (muirgen) and is one of the names for the Lady of the Lake. She is associated with both Vivianne and Nimue, who are also known as the Lady of the Lake. The western sea (the Atlantic Ocean) is where Her island of Avalon (also known as Ynys Avallach, the Isle of Apples and the Fortunate Isle) is located - where She receives the dead and heals them of their earthly pains.

Could the names morgue, mortuary and morte also be related to this Goddess of Death? Avalon is associated with Glastonbury Tor, which some legends say was once a magic island surrounded by water. Morgan is one of the three queens that takes King Arthur's body to Avalon to heal. As a witch and healer, she is said to know the power of both healing and poisonous herbs. In Avalon, She presided over nine priestess's who were prophetesses and healers. Avalon is known to have been an oracular center. Some believe that Avalon was a Druidic college for priestesses of women's mysteries. Certain healing wells are also sacred to Her in Britain - known as Morgan's wells.

In one Arthurian legend, King Uther Pendragon was obsessed with lust for Morgan's mother, Ygraine. With Merlin's help, Uther tricked her into sleeping with him by taking on the shape of Ygraine's husband, the Duke of Gorlois, after he had already murdered the Duke. Her new stepfather could not abide Morgan since she suspected him of his ignoble deed, so Uther sent Morgan to Ygraine's sister, Viviane - the abbess at the convent on Avalon. Here, safe among the nuns, Morgan was taught the art of sorcery. She furthered her education in magic as a student of Merlin's when she came to King Arthur's court. During this transition time between the old religion and the new, the convent could well have been a Druidic college for women.

Goddess of the Holy Well

In Irish folklore, there is a Christian legend of Murgewn (Sea Born) or Murgelt (Mermaid), a girl who left a holy well uncovered, which flooded the plain. She lived under the water for hundreds of years in the shape of a salmon, with her dog in the shape of an otter. Eventually, she was caught by the priests and given Christian baptism. She “died a holy virgin and still works wonders of healing in Ireland.”

Fairy Queen

Morgan le Fay also means “Morgan of the Fairies”, and is one of the names of the Fairy Queen. In Scottish folklore there are two fairy courts, the Seelie Court (kindly fairies), and the Unseelie Court (mischievous fairies). I suspect Morgan of being Queen of the Unseelie Court! The Dark faeries are also known as the Dubh Sithian.

Real Estate Goddess

Morgan is said to own three enchanted castles in Britain - Castle Chariot, Belle Garde, and the Castle of the Valley of No Return. She is also said to own castles under the water, such as the one under the Straights of Messina. She also reigns over Avalon – the Isle of Apples. All her lands are associated with healing.

Sex Goddess

In legend, Morgan/Morrigan has many consorts - Dagda, Arthur, Merlin, The Green Knight (The Green Man?), King Uriens, Sir Accolon, Ogier the Dane, and the Fairy King. (She was, however, unsuccessful in Her bid for the affections of Sir Lancelot and Chuchulain.)

Goddess of Many Names

She has many attributes, associations and titles - Queen of Fairy, Mermaid, Sea Priestess, Healer, Teacher, Prophetess, Mother Goddess, Moon Goddess, Queen of Witches, Queen of the Otherworld, Shapeshifter, Enchantress, Sorceress, Raven Queen, Seducer, Trickster, Warrior, Destroyer, Chooser of the Slain, Bean Sidhe, Phantom Queen, and Queen of Ghosts. Morgan is similar to many other chthonic Goddesses - Oya, Kali, Hecate, Cailleach, Cerridwen, Hel, Lilith, Baba Yaga, Raganas, Circe, Medea, Erishkigal, and Isis.

Alternate Names and Spellings

Morgan, Morgen, Morgana, Morgaine, Morgause, Morrigan, Morrigna, Morven, Morganwg, Morvenna, Morwenna, Mor Riorghain, Muirgen, Murgewn, Murgelt.

Modern Role Model

Morgan is a perfect deity and role model for women (and men) who wish to “take their power” in this world. She teaches us how to protect ourselves, heal ourselves and take control of our lives and manifest what we need for a truly joyful life. She leads us into the inner mysteries and magic of our Celtic heritage.

Correspondences:

Colors	Red - sexual passion and war Green - healing and Faerie magic Black - death, power, mystery and wisdom
Elements	Water - Lady of the Lake, mermaid aspect Air - shapeshifting to raven and crow Earth - residence in the Isle of Apples Fire - warrior aspect
Planets	Venus - seductive aspects Mars - warrior tendencies Saturn - crone, death, rebirth
Zodiac Sign	Scorpio - sex, secrecy, the occult, and death
Moon phases:	Full Moon - healing and faerie magic Dark Moon - sorcery, prophesy and mystery Her energy seems to flow from Full Moon to Dark Moon, during the waning period, although a deity this powerful can be called upon at any time. She has no limits.
Numbers:	Three - She is part of the Triple Goddess and is sometimes referred to in three aspects - the Three Morrigan being Nemainn, Badb and Macha) Nine - She is the leader of the nine priestesses of Avalon
Feast or Holy Day	The Morrigan is said to have mated with the Irish God, Dagda on November 1st, which is also Samhain. It is the only date I have found in reference to Her. November is the waning time of year, between Samhain and Yule (the season of Ghosts), during the time of Scorpio.
Trees/plants	Apple tree - She resides on the Isle of Apples, and they are a very magical fruit in Celtic tradition. Yew tree - the tree of death Blackthorn tree - the tree of sorcery Herbs - both healing and poisonous herbs would be sacred to Her.
Food	Apples and herbal seasoning. Her association with apples recalls the story of Snow White who was fed a poisoned apple by a wicked queen.
Drink:	Apple juice, apple wine, sloe gin (from the blackthorn berries)
Stones:	Quartz crystal - especially smoky quartz and can be used for scrying. Any dark red or black stones - obsidian, jet, onyx, black tourmaline, garnet
Ritual Tools	Wand - apple, blackthorn or yew; cauldron (for Her magic brews); mortar and pestle (for Her herbal concoctions); Pentacle (according to Caitlin and John Matthews, the pentacle was Morgan's crest), athame - (to direct Her magical

Water Power of Mermaids, guide our sight
Fire Power of Warriors, our will burns bright
Earth Power of Herbs, ground this rite.

Invocation of Morgan:

Lady of the Apple Trees

Keeper of the Western Breeze,

Morgan, come to us now!

Guardian of the sacred well

Speaker of the healing spell

Morgan, come to us now!

Mistress of the Dark Moon Night

Onyx raven, bold in flight

Morgan, come to us now!

Teacher of warriors, and of sex,

Of spells that cure and spells that hex

Morgan, come to us now!

Bean Sidhe by the river ford

Wielder of the Sacred Sword

Morgan, come to us now!

Lady of the Sacred Lake

Where Excaliber, She did make

Morgan, come to us now!

Ruler of the fairy mound

Queen of Fay, She is crowned

Morgan, come to us now!

Goddess of life, death, re-birth

Ancient One, Oh, Mother Earth

Morgan, come to us now!!!

Invocation of the God:

Who Is he?

He is the wind that gives voice to the trees.

He is the Lord of Air.

Who Is he?

He is the Stag King defending his does.

He is the Horned One.

Who Is he?

He is the sea making love to the shore.

He is the Selkie.

Who Is he?

He is the mountain guarding the land.

He is the Lord of Earth.

Who is he?

He is the Forest, the Meadow, the Wild.

He is the Green Man.

Who is he?

He is a circle of standing stones.

He is the Sentinel of Eternity.

Who is he?

He is the fire along the blade of a sword.

He is the Lord of Battle.

Who is he?

He is the crystal on the crown of his staff.

He is the Mage.

Who is he?

He is the song in the strings of his harp.

He is the Bard.

Who is he?

He is All.

Morgan holds aloft a crystal ball or dark mirror.

(Faces East) We turn to the East and open the Gate and ask the Crone to tell us our Fate.

(Faces South) We turn to the South and open the Door and ask the Mage to tell us His lore.

(Faces West) We turn to the West and open the Portal and ask the Seers our future to foretell.

(Faces North) We turn to the North and open the Way and ask the Old Ones to join us this day.

Morgan and Merlin hold the scythe above their heads and sing.

Morgan/Merlin: All must pass between us, the Veil of Death awaits, but the cycle of rebirth goes on and on.

Participants pass beneath the scythe in silence. When they have gathered on “the other side”, Morgan leads them to a specially prepared place of meditation. Decorate the area with bones and skulls (made of stone or ceramic), and dark cloths and ribbons. Perhaps a small stone barrow could be constructed to represent the burial mounds of our mighty Celtic ancestors.

Morgan offers them a sip of sloe gin (from the blackthorn tree). The participants are left to contemplate their death. Music could be softly played. Before leaving, Morgan asks them,

Morgan : Are you prepared for death? Did you accomplish everything you needed in this lifetime? Are there any regrets or unfinished business? Perhaps, if you are lucky, I will give you another chance.

After a suitable amount of time for meditation, Morgan and Merlin hold up an applewood staff or wand above their heads and sing:

Morgan/Merlin: All must pass between us, the Veil of Life awaits, but the cycle of rebirth goes on and on.

Rejoicing participants pass beneath the wand to the land of the living.

Cakes and wine consist of apples and apples juice (or apple wine) - the fruit of immortality. After the repast, Morgan can lead the group in scrying, channeling, or the making of magic potions, all arts that Morgan was historically associated with.

The Circle is open, but unbroken. Merry Meet and Merry Part and Merry Meet again. And May the Gods Preserve the Craft!

Another Morgan ritual, for herbalists, midwives and healers:

Morgan should be sitting on a green cloth on the ground in front of a tree of wisdom (or performed near the sea or riverbank).

Before Her are two mortals and pestles - one made of black material, with a pinch of poisonous herbs, the other made of white material, with a pinch of healing herbs. In front of Morgan is the traditional cauldron full of water on a tripod, with a fire underneath.

Morgan: I am keeper of Nature's secrets. I know where to gather the herbs that heal and those that harm. (She pours the contents from the white bowl into the cauldron and stirs with a spoon.) To follow My ways, you must travel the Gray path between Black and White. To work with Me, you must know the Dark side of the Moon, as well as the bright. The world of the Necromancer is a twilight world. (As Morgan stirs, She sings:)

Healing fire, burning true

Take my ills away with you.

Power rises in your steam.

Send to me a healing dream.

With flower, herb, root and tree

Make me well and set me free.

All that need healing may come forth for a sip of the brew. Note - this ritual should be done by someone who is a competent herbalist. This would be a good time to teach the participants to recognize poisonous and beneficial herbs in the wild. If the Priestess is not a knowledgeable herbalist, safe store bought herbs should be used such as chamomile, peppermint, rosehip, etc.

Invocations

Invocation to the Arthurian Triple Goddess:

Holy Fairy Maiden, Nimue, Nimue,

New Moon, come to us!

Lake of the Lake, Viviane, Viviane,

Full Moon, come to us!

Ancient Queen of Witches,

Morrigan, Morrigan,

Dark Moon, Come to Us

Invocation to Morgan at Dark Moon:

Lady of Night

In this dark hour

Share with us

Your magic power

In Dark of Moon

and void of light

We celebrate

The Morgan's Night

In working with a priest, a complimentary invocation is:

By Ash Tree's wellb
and Merlin's stones
By Bladud's spells
and Shaman's bones

In Dark of Moon
and Void of light
we celebrate
the Mage's night.

Upon completion of working:

May the work
we do tonight
be complete
'fore Moon's first light
On this night
of Moon's rebirth
May we part
with love and mirth.

Morganian Moon Cycle

Working with Morgan can be both powerful and dangerous. She works in both the light and the dark, traveling a twilight path between. She is both healer and destroyer, young and old, compassionate and vengeful, passionate and bloody, beautiful and frightful, frivolous and mysterious. She demands courage, dedication, loyalty and imagination from Her followers. And what She gives in return, is wisdom.

Moon Cycles

The Moon Cycle of Morgan begins at Full Moon and moves throughout the Waning Phase to Dark Moon, Her most powerful aspect, then back to Full again.

Full Moon

Morgan is Queen of the timeless Faerie Isle - Avalon, where She is Goddess of Healing and Prophecy. She is also a Sea Goddess and Her island can be found at the end of the silver path the Moon casts upon the Western Sea. As the Lade of the Lake, any working near a lake can invoke Her presence. As Washer at the Ford, She can be found at rivers as well. This is a good time to ask for water magic - love, dreams, youth, healing and prosperity. Use your Cup or Cauldron, filled with water, in your ritual tonight. Dedicate nine apples to Her and set them adrift in a body of water. Meditate on traveling the silver moon path to the Fortunate Isles and ask Her blessing. Dance near water. Swim. Visit a well and dedicate it to Her for the night. If you have a sword and scabbard dedicated to Her, tonight you work with the healing scabbard. If you have a clear quartz ball, tonight She will reveal Herself to you within the crystal.

Waning Moon

Morrigan is a Warrior Goddess, a battle raven, a banshee, and Washer of Shrouds. This is a good time to ask Her for courage, fortitude, and strength in your battles, and for protection against adversaries. She can be invoked in banishing, binding, and cursing rituals. Use fire to invoke Her during this period. Remember - She armed and trained warriors in Ireland, and in some legends, forged Excalibur to defend Britain. Tonight use Her sword, or a blackthorn or yew wand to call Her.

Dark Moon

The Queen of Witches rules the darkest night of the month. This is a time of passion, secrets and sorcery - a time to let your dark side free. Dark Moon is like Samhain - it is a time for spellbinding, divination, communicating with the dead. This is the one night of the month when spirits are free to roam - ghosts, banshees, barrow wights, demons, and phantoms. Morgan rules them all this night.

This would be a good night to visit barrows, mounds, caves, or cemeteries. Tonight you invoke Her with Earth. She is a shapeshifter - a woman and raven, crone and seductress - so if you want to experiment with transformation, tonight is the night! Morgan le Fay worked her magic with a dark mirror. Find one, and call Her image into it. She is also associated with the Grail, which in ancient times, was the Celtic Cauldron of Rebirth. Tonight, brew up magic with your own cauldron.

Waxing Moon

Morgan's lighter side emerges as the Moon waxes, and once again, She moves into her Faerie aspect. This is a time for spells of youth, beauty and fantasy. Look for Her in apple orchards, or near fairy trees such as elder and hawthorn. Read fairytales, re-read Alice in Wonderland, go

into a meadow or forest and find the door to the fairy realm and grow young again! This is a time of renewal. Work with an apple wand, raven feathers, wind and air.

Morgan Meditation

Wearing dark robes, have participants seated comfortably around a steaming cauldron filled with simmering mugwort. The fumes will help enhance this meditation.

Imagine yourself walking through a twilight woods. Around you are ancient and powerful

trees. This woods contains all your favorite trees - apple, oak, willow, birch, rowan, hazel, ash, hawthorn, blackthorn, alder, elder. There is a gentle breeze, and the trees seem to be whispering to you in their ancient tongue. As the woods grow darker, you hurry down the twisting path to an unknown destination.

Suddenly from the branch of a magnificent alder tree, a huge black raven takes flight and flies before you, down the path, and disappears. You follow the bird down the path between the trees.

There is a glow in the darkness. The path opens up to a small grove in the middle of the trees. And in the center of the glen is a cauldron, set on a tripod, with a crackling fire underneath. You are hungry, but the odor is an unfamiliar, feral, woodsy smell. Your hunger fades. You notice the raven on a tree branch near the path at the border of the glen, staring at you with gleaming greenish eyes. You look around to see who tends the fire, and looking back toward the raven, you find instead, a figure shrouded in dark robes, walking slowly toward you.

The face beneath the hood is invisible, only the gleam of white hands shows within the folds of the sleeves. The figure is holding a large ladle, and walks past you to the cauldron. From a pouch at her waist, the figure pours what looks like herbs into the cauldron, then stirs with the ladle. You hear a low sultry female voice murmur in a language you have never heard.

She turns to you and throws back her hood, revealing her face. She is beautiful, with long jet black hair with a hint of red framing her pale face. She wears a black crescent shaped gem on a circlet on her brow above large emerald green eyes, reflecting the fire beneath the cauldron. She smiles at you, a bewitching smile, and you find yourself smiling back.

"I am Morgana. In legends I am called Morgan le Fay." She introduces herself to you, "And what are you called?"

You stammer your name, awed by Her beauty and the power in Her deep, rich voice, which seems to reverberate through the woods. The air seems to swirl around Her, caressing Her, lifting Her hair gently around Her face. Her green eyes dance in amusement as She watches you.

She turns and scoops up a ladleful of the pungent brew from the steaming cauldron, and offers some to you. Her staring eyes reminds you of the raven, and you are compelled to take the ladle and drink.

You are suddenly nauseated, dizzy, and disoriented, your legs give out beneath you, and you crash to the ground, gasping for breath. Poisoned! Dying! Darkness! But no, you are still conscious. You try to scream, but only manage a harsh croak. You stretch out your arms, and find yourself surrounded on both sides by huge black feathers waving in the air. On the lip of the cauldron dances the raven with gleaming green eyes. You realize that you, having drunk from

the broth of the raven, have become a raven. The other bird flies off, landing on the branch of a tree, and waits for you. You try your wings. Awkwardly, you flap what was once your arms. Then powerfully, rapidly, you move your wings and take flight. Unsteady at first, you gradually learn to balance, to compensate, equalize, to direct your flight, and you follow whom you now know to be Morgan the Raven, into the night.

Listen to the night, to the sound of the wind through the trees, to the sound of your wings as you move through the evening sky, to your heart as it beats in rhythm with the universe.

See the vast forest of trees below you, surrounding the town you came from, and the mountains beyond the forest surrounded in mist. Look up and see the distant stars above you as they move in a slow stately spiral, forming the enormous Universal Maze. Hidden somewhere in that maze is the secret of the Dark Moon. Slowly you spiral around and around inside the turning maze.

Your journey has brought you to the center of the maze, and now I will reveal Her secret to you. The Dark Side of the Moon is the Cauldron of Morrigan. It is the Black Hole in space that takes in everything and gives nothing. All light and life are sucked deeper and deeper, heavier and heavier into that cauldron of darkness. In that vast womb, life and light are gathered until She explodes, giving pulsing, radiating birth, funneling new life into the void. She is the First Mother, the Mother of All Things, Weaver of the Great Web on whose threads all the spiraling galaxies, nebulas, suns, stars, worlds and moons are caught. Through the eons, Morgan has poured out the contents of Her cauldron and planed the universe anew, only to harvest and gather it once again, in a never ending pattern of birth, death and renewal.

You are lying on the ground, in the center of the grove. The cauldron is empty and cold, and the raven is nowhere to be seen. But on the ground next to you is a magnificent shining black raven's feather. That is Morgan's gift to you, a reminder of your journey, for you are one of the Wise Ones now, one of the Elders, and a Priest or Priestess of the Great Morrigan.

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About the Author . . .

My interest in Morgan le Fay goes back to my childhood. When I was a little girl, my big brother, Johnny, loved to scare me with stories about the evil witches who were out to get me. Finally, one night, when I was seven years old, my father told me that I had nothing to fear from witches, because my great, great, great grandmother was Morgan le Fay, the Queen of Witches, and they would always protect me from harm. Morgan was a family name (my grandmother's last name, my uncle's first name and my middle name) and the Morgan family came from Glamorgan County, Wales. My father told me that the legend that we descended from Morgan le Fay had been passed down in the Morgan family for generations. I have been Her child ever since, and eventually, Her priestess.

Morgan has given me many gifts over the years. I usually acknowledge Her with a ritual of thanks - I set sail nine apples in the Western Sea (the Pacific Ocean). She's left me many raven's feathers, including three I found in Avebury Circle, England!. What I've promised Her in return for Her love and support is to write Her story. I am collecting any and all information on Her.

