



Alan Lee,
'Hunting Twyth',
The Mabinogion.

Gwyn ap Nudd: Transfigurations of a character on the way from medieval literature to neo-pagan beliefs

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Any character originating in folk tradition and used for a long time in poetry, fiction and art is subject to a gradual transfiguration of its features due to interplay between oral tradition and written sources, between folklore and literature, between creative writing and compiling scholarly opinion and research results. This interplay may result in changes and transfigurations of the 'original' meaning and characteristics, or – more correctly – to the meaning and characteristics this character had at a certain point in time that is chosen as a reference point.

This paper will present a concise summary of the main transfigurations which Gwyn ap Nudd (Foster 1953; Bartrum 1993), a supernatural character from Welsh tradition, also known as King of the Fairies, *Brenin y Tylwyth Teg*, has been subjected to. It covers the time from his first appearance in medieval literature to the present and his meaning within neo-pagan beliefs. The objective is to provide a guide into this vast matter rather than an in-depth discussion of the various items. The most important catalysts in a long-standing development will be highlighted.

Thus, this paper will be structured according to the chronology of the evidence. It will begin with the introduction of Gwyn ap Nudd as presented by the medieval and early modern sources, followed by some considerations of his role in Welsh folklore. The features newly attributed to him during the time of Romanticism will be briefly covered, followed by an assessment of the ideas Sir John Rhys developed about Gwyn which are virtually the key to understanding the image of this character within today's neo-pagan beliefs. It will continue by showing the role Gwyn was assigned in the works of Robert Graves and Gerald Gardner, who each had a tremendous influence on the neo-pagan reception of Gwyn. The closing section will summarise the consequences of ideas developed by Rhys, Graves and Gardner for the modern neo-pagan image and function of Gwyn ap Nudd.

Medieval and early modern sources

Poem XXXIV of the *Black Book of Carmarthen*

Gwyn ap Nudd is a fictional character, who appeared for the first time in poem XXXIV of the *Black Book of Carmarthen* (Jarman and Jones 1982). The manuscript dates back to the middle of the 13th century (Jarman 1985; Huws 2000; Dengholm 1954), but the poem was presumably written at the end of the 11th century, as linguistic evidence shows (Rowland 1990). This text is central for the analysis of the transfigurations Gwyn was subjected to by scholars in the 19th century. Therefore, I will present the text of the *Black Book* following the edition of Jarman (Jarman and Jones 1982) together with a translation.

The dialogue of Gwyn ap Nudd and Gwyddno Garanhir

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|---|--|
| 1. <i>Tarv trin anvidin blaut
arbenic llw llid anhaut
Dinam eiroes am oes naut.</i> | <i>Bull of battle, fierce, terrible,
Ruler of a host, unpleasant in wrath,
Of perfect trust, I ask you for protection.</i> |
| 2. <i>Y gan gur gurt y kinnit.
arbennic llw llidowit.
ath vit naut canys erchit.</i> | <i>From a hero of valiant supremacy,
Ruler of a host, lord of wrath,
You get protection because you seek it.</i> |
| 3. <i>Can is naut im a rotit.
mor verth yth ogyuechit.
guaur llw py dv pan doit.</i> | <i>Since you give me so fine protection
I ask you,
Hero of a host, where do you come from?</i> |
| 4. <i>Ban deuaw o kad a chiminad maur
ac aessaur in aghad
briuint penaur peleidrad.</i> | <i>I come from a battle and great slaughter,
Shield in hand,
Pushing of spears bruised heads.</i> |
| 5. <i>Ath kiuarchaw hvyscun gur.
ae iscuid in aghen.
pebirgur pan iv dy echen.</i> | <i>I greet you steadfast hero
With shield in hand.
Brave warrior what is your descent?</i> |
| 6. <i>Caringrun wi march kad trablunt.
hud im gelwir e guin mab nud.
gortorch creurdilad merch lut.</i> | <i>Round-hoofed is my horse, agitation of battle,
Thus I am called Gwyn ap Nudd,
The lover of Creiddylad merch Ludd.</i> |

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|---|--|
| 7. <i>Can is ti guin gur kiwir.
racod ny ryimgelir
Minnev guitnev garanhir.</i> | <i>Because you are Gwyn, an upright hero,
From you I do not conceal
I am Gwyddno Garanhir.</i> |
| 8. <i>Nim gad e gan kyulauaret a thi.
urth i fruïn yd wet.
dywris im trum tawuy a net.</i> | <i>The white horse does not allow me
conversation with you
Because it leads with the bridle
It hastens away to the ridge of Tawe and Nedd.</i> |
| 9. <i>Nid y tawue nessaw a lawaraw urthid.
namvin y tawue eithaw.
Erir mor terruïn treiaw.</i> | <i>I do not speak of the nearest Tawe
But of the farthest Tawe.
Eagle of the fierce sea, I will retreat.</i> |
| 10. <i>Yscithreid vy modruy eur kywruy cann.
y gan wy auary.
gueleis aer rac kaer wantry.</i> | <i>Engraved is my ring, the white horse has a
golden saddle
Because of my vanity
I saw a battle before Caer Fandwy.</i> |
| 11. <i>Rac mantvy llv a weleis
aessaur brihuid. torrhid eis.
mygedaul. kein a dygei treis.</i> | <i>Before Mandwy I saw a host,
Shields broken, ribs (spears) broken,
The honourable and beautiful waged war.</i> |
| 12. <i>Gwin ab nut but. bitinaur.
kint y sirthei kadoet rac carnetaur dy ueirch
no bruyn briw y laur.</i> | <i>Gwyn benefit of the hosts,
Sooner armies would fall before the hooves of
your horse
than rushes broken to the ground.</i> |
| 13. <i>Ys tec vy ki ac is trun.
Ac yss ew. orev or cvn.
Dormarch oet hunnv a fv y maelgun.</i> | <i>Beautiful is my dog and fine,
he is the best of dogs.
Dormarch was that one that belonged to
Maelgwn.</i> |
| 14. <i>Dormach truïnruıt ba ssillit arnaw
caniss amgiffredit.
dy gruidir ar wibir winit.</i> | <i>Dormarch of the ruddy nose at what are you
looking.
Since I cannot understand
Your wandering on the sky mountains.</i> |

15	<i>Mi a wum in y lle llas guendoleu. mab keidav colowin kerteu. ban ryerhint brein ar creu.</i>	<i>I have been at the place of death of Gwenddoleu Son of Ceidio, supporter of poetry When ravens screamed over blood.</i>
16	<i>Mi a wum in lle llas bran mab ywerit clod lydan. ban ryerint brein garthan.</i>	<i>I have been at the place of Bran's death, Son of Ywerydd of wide praise. When carrion crows screamed.</i>
17	<i>Mi a wum lle llas llacheu mab arthur uthir ig kerteu. ban ryreint brein ar creu.</i>	<i>I have been where Llacheu died, Son of Arthur marvelous in songs When ravens scream over blood.</i>
18	<i>Mi a wum lle llas meuric Mab kareian clod edmic. ban ryreint brein ar cic.</i>	<i>I have been in the place of the death of Meurig Son of Careian of honorable praises, When ravens screamed over flesh.</i>
19	<i>Ny buum lle llas gwallauc mab goholheth teithiauc attwod lloegir mab lleynnac</i>	<i>I have not been where Gwallawg died Son of a lawful prince, The trouble for England, son of Lleennawg.</i>
20	<i>Mi a wum lle llas milvir pridein. or duyrein ir goglet. Mi. wi. wiv. vintev. y. bet.</i>	<i>I have been where the soldiers of Britain died From the east to the north. I am, they [are] in the grave.</i>
21	<i>Mi a wum lle llas milquir bridein or duyrein ir dehev. Mi. wi. wiv. vintev y aghev.</i>	<i>I have been where the soldiers of Britain died From the east to the south I am, they [are] in death (transl. A.R.).</i>

Stanzas 1, 3, 5, 7, 12 and 14 are attributed to Gwyddno Garanhir and 2, 4, 6, 8-11, 13, 15-21 to Gwyn ap Nudd. The poem of the *Black Book of Carmarthen* depicts Gwyn as a hunter and warrior; a leader of a host and a supernatural character; the latter is accomplished by Gwyn's mentioning of *Caer Fandwy*, an otherworldly fortress which seems to be located in *Annwn* according to the poem *Preiddeu Annwn* (The Spoils of Annwn). This poem is found in *Llyfr Taliesin* (Book of Taliesin), dating back to the 14th century (Higley 2012). The Welsh noun 'Annwn' denotes a realm beyond the world of men, literally the 'Non-World'. It is described as a beautiful land in 'The First Branch of the Mabinogi', and as a consequence has to be regarded as the Welsh equivalent to the Irish 'Otherworld'. However, in the course of time this expression has

gradually undergone a change of meaning, so that it could be used in modern times as equivalent to the term 'uffern', 'hell', in a Christian sense (GPC; Koch 2006).

Gwyn is equipped with all the epithets and attributes of the formidable hero familiar from the contemporary saga poetry (Jarman 1967) and from the heroic poetry of Aneirin, *Y Gododdin* (Williams 1970; Evans 1908). Gwyn is a hero, a terrible 'bull of battle', and he is noted for his reverence for a lady, as he introduces himself as lover of Creiddylad. He appears as a splendid knight on a white horse with a golden saddle and a precious ring.

The heroes of the contemporary and earlier poetry are described with equivalent terms. The metaphor 'bull of battle' is used quite frequently. It can be found for example in the poem *Enwev meibion llywarch hen* (Llywarch Hen's sons' names) (Rowland 1990). The hero Eithynyn is entitled 'bull of combat' in the poem *Y Gododdin*, and the Welsh Triads, *Trioedd Ynys Prydein*, list 'three Bull-protectors of the island of Britain', the hero Gwenddoleu, lamented by Gwyn ap Nudd, being one of them, and 'three bull-chieftains of the island of Britain' (Bromwich 1961, 7). A hero was expected to be terrible in battle. In *Y Gododdin* Madog is described as follows: 'he showed no mercy to those whom he pursued/ He did not withdraw from battle until blood flowed'; Isag is described as 'unwavering in his ferocity'. Owain ap Urien is called 'reaper of enemies' in his death song. But on the other hand a hero who cuts down 'enemies like rushes' could well be 'breathless before a maiden', like Madog in the poem *Y Gododdin*. The 'swan-coloured horses' (*Y Gododdin*) as well as the 'shining mail-shirts and swords' (*ibid.*; Jarman 1967), and the 'spurs of gold' like those of Gwen in the *Llywarch hen* poems (Rowland 1990), complete the image of the formidable hero. Thus, Gwyn riding his white horse, with his golden saddle and precious ring, fits perfectly into this image of the ideal knight and hero.

It is obvious that the choice of metaphors and epithets relates the poem about Gwyn to the heroic world of *Y Gododdin* described by Aneirin, who tells in his poem about a host of warriors and heroes of the Old North, *Yr Hen Ogledd* – a region which comprised the south of Scotland and the north of England.

However, this relationship between poem XXXIV of the *Black Book of Carmarthen* and the Old North is not only established by drafting the image of Gwyn ap Nudd in a way which has been applied to the heroes of this region before, but also by the content of the poem. Gwyn ap Nudd is associated with the men of the Old North, especially with a group of warriors and princes who were in conflict with the kin and the patrons of Cynderyn Garthwys (St Kentigern) (Rowland 1990; Bartrum 1993). Gwyn ap Nudd has been present at the battles in which they lost their lives, and it is their death which Gwyn is lamenting.

Culwch ac Olwen

The earliest prose text mentioning Gwyn is the tale *Culwch ac Olwen* found in the *White Book of Rhydderch* (Evans 1907; Davies 2007). This text is part of the 11 vernacular tales which are

sometimes referred to collectively as the *Mabinogi* or *Mabinogion*. The present redaction of the text is assumed to date back to 1100 A.D. (Foster 1953).

The tale *Culhwch ac Olwen* tells how Culhwch was obliged to hunt the monster boar Twrch Trwyth in order to obtain the comb and the shears that lay between its ears, as the father of his beloved Olwen, the giant Ysbaddaden, wanted to have them before he would give his daughter Olwen to Culhwch. Culhwch is aided by King Arthur and all his court to cope with this and other difficult tasks. The setting of the story strongly reminds one of the Irish tales, especially the deeds of the Tuatha de Danann or the Finn-cycle. The king and his heroes clearly show supernatural traits. The hunt of a monster boar and the courting of a lady of non-human lineage, the daughter of the giant Ysbaddaden, Olwen, are the key issues of this story.

It is notable that this story about an adventure of Arthur and his heroes pre-dates Geoffrey of Monmouth, whose work laid the foundations of the vast literature on Arthurian romance all over Europe. Actually *Culhwch ac Olwen* is the earliest Arthurian tale in any language (Gantz 1976).

For a successful boar hunt Arthur's host of excellent heroes must be joined by Gwyn ap Nudd, who needs the famous sea-going horse Du y Moroedd, 'Black of the Seas' (Bromwich 1961, 113-14) to take part in this hunting company. The redactor tells us: '*Ny heli[r] Twrch Trwyth nes kaffel Gwyn mab Nudd ar dodes Duw aryl dieul Annwyn yndaw rac rewinyaw y bressen. Ny hebcorir efodyno.*' (Bromwich and Evans 1997, 26-7): 'Twrch Trwyth is not hunted until one gets Gwyn ap Nudd in whom God put the spirit of the devils of Annwn lest the world would be destroyed. He cannot be spared from there.' Thus, Gwyn is presented as lord over a tribe of demonic spirits and being also filled with demonic powers. Gwyn's leaving Annwn would endanger the very existence of the world.

Yet, despite all this, Gwyn joins the hunting company. This is the story according to the *White Book*. The *Red Book*, however, enters him as a member of Arthur's court, which is an anachronism according to the further plot of the story, but need not be discussed in the context of this essay.

In the course of events, Gwyn is introduced as the lover of Creiddylad in that he has actually taken her away from Gwythyr ap Greidawl, with whom the girl went. But before Gwythyr could enjoy the pleasures of being her lover or husband, Gwyn abducted Creiddylad and fought against the host which Gwythyr had gathered in order to win back the lady from his rival. In this battle Gwyn was victorious, took captives, a certain Greid ap Eri among them, and treated the warriors who had dared to challenge him most cruelly.

Arthur, however, obviously has the authority to make peace between the rivals for Creiddylad's love. He sentences them to fight every 1st May for the girl, who was to stay undisturbed by either party in the house of her father. The yearly fighting was to end no sooner than the world would end. The winner on the Day of Judgment could then keep the girl.

Further on in the story, Arthur always relies on Gwyn's advice when things become really difficult. Thus Gwyn's advice is needed for the hunt of Twrch Trwyth and when the blood of the Black Hag has to be obtained.

The redactor of the *Culhwch ac Olwen* tale depicts Gwyn as a hunter-warrior with magical powers, but by saying that 'God put the spirit of the devils of Annwn [in him] lest the world would be destroyed', he classifies the inhabitants of Annwn as 'devils'. This sentence shows the Christian bias of the redactor (Foster 1953), but it also characterises Gwyn as the antagonist of 'this world', i.e. the world of men, as he is equipped with powers threatening this world.

All this dovetails with the fact that *Culhwch ac Olwen* is not only the source of Gwyn's and Gwythyr's yearly combat for Creiddylad. Moreover, the tale shows most clearly of all sources a similarity of Gwyn to Finn mac Umail (aka Finn McCool) in that Gwyn is a character belonging to the 'World of the Outlaw' in the sense Joseph Nagy uses this term (Nagy 1985; Nagy 1987).

Gwyn's being the Welsh equivalent to Finn mac Umail has long been suggested based on the etymology of the names 'Finn' and 'Gwyn' ('white, fair, blessed') and a comparable ancestry when considering the Welsh 'Nudd' and the Irish 'Nuada' as equivalent characters (Murphy 1953; Foster 1953; Chadwick 1931). Actually, a careful analysis of the tale *Culwch ac Olwen* suggests that the similarities between Finn and Gwyn go beyond this.

Gerard Murphy identifies one of the oldest motifs connected with Finn as his fight against a 'malevolent burner', often discernible in the tales by a fire-related name of the latter (Murphy 1953). Joseph Nagy highlights the importance of Finn being trained and educated by druid-warrior women in the wilderness (*dá benfénnidi; bendruí*). He also draws attention to the first right of the Fenians, the warriors led by Finn mac Umail, to any girl who should be given into marriage. Moreover, Joseph Nagy highlights the fact that the Fenian leader's unsocial love affairs often represent a destabilising element for society. He also shows convincingly that the actual objective of the Fiana was to mediate passage-rites exceeding all common experience (Nagy 1985).

All those elements are found in Gwyn in the tale *Culhwch ac Olwen*. His chief foe Gwythyr ap Greidawl bears a name related to 'heat, passion' – 'greid' – in its patronym, as is the name of another of Gwyn's foes, of Greid ap Eri. Gwyn takes Creiddylad shortly before her transition from a maiden to a wife, and the eternal yearly combat for her takes place at the transition of winter to summer, at the calends of May (*Calan Mai*). The episode in which Arthur calls Gwyn and Gwythyr because he wants to ask them for advice on how to deal with the witches (*Y Gwiddonod*) could well be understood as a motif drawing on some lost tradition in which both Gwyn and Gwythyr are especially familiar with the ways of those wild warrior women.

All those elements reinforce the suggestion that Gwyn ap Nudd belongs to the 'World of the Outlaw', the world outside the well-ordered society of man, which is needed at times to protect the world against demonic forces, like the boar Twrch Trwyth, but at the same time induces a destabilising element for the order in the realm of men.

The poetry of the Poets of the Gentry

Furthermore, Gwyn ap Nudd is mentioned in various poems by the so-called poets of the gentry, the most famous being Dafydd ap Gwilym, but also by William Llyn, Huw Machno, Rhisiart Phylip, Rhisiart Cynwal and Gruffudd Hiraethog (Roberts 1980/1).

In accordance with the observation that Gwyn ap Nudd is shown as a representative of the 'World of the Outlaw', a world which lies beyond the ploughed and tilled fields, the poets of the gentry (Johnston 1999; Roberts 1980/1) show Gwyn as a representative of wild nature and the world outside the cultivated world of human society, the wilderness, murky times and unpleasant places. It is Dafydd ap Gwilym who knows that Gwyn ap Nudd can 'take people'. Gruffudd Hiraethog for his part brings Gwyn ap Nudd into connection with the *Cwn Annwn*, the Dogs of Annwn (Jones 1979), thus relating him to the motif-complex of the Spectral Hunt (Roberts 1980/1).

A fragment of Dafydd ap Gwilym's famous poem *Y Niwl* illustrates how Gwyn and Annwn are used as reference points to describe the oppressive mist:

Fragment of 'Y Niwl' (DAG)

*Codarmur cawad ormes,
Twyllai wyr, tywyll o wedd,
Toron gwrddonig tiredd,
Tyrau uchel eu helynt
Tylwyth Gwyn, talaith y gwynt,
Tir a gudd ei ddeurudd ddygn,
Torsed yn cuddio teirsygn,
Tywyllwg, un tew allardd,
Delli byd i dwyllo bardd,
Llydanwe gombr gosombraff,
Ar lled y'i rhodded fal rhaff,
Gwe adrgop, Ffrenigisiop ffrwyth,
Gwan dalar Gwyn a'i dylwyth,
Mwg brych yn fynych a fydd,
Mogodarth cylch meigoedydd,
Anadl arth lle cyfarth cwn,
Ennaint gwrachiod Annwn,
Gochwith megis gwlyth y gwlych,
Habrsiwn tir anehwybrych. [...]*

*coat of armour of an oppressive shower,
it would deceive men, dark appearance,
shaggy cloak of the lands,
towers of Gwyn's tribe
travelling on high, headdress of the wind,
its grim cheeks hide the land,
a blanket covering three signs of the Zodiac,
darkness, a thick unlovely one,
blindness of the world to deceive a poet,
broad web of thick deceptive cambric,
it was spread out like a rope,
a spider's web, like wares of a French shop,
flaccid headland of Gwyn and his tribe,
speckled smoke which gets everywhere,
steam around small trees,
bear's breath where dogs bark,
ointment of the witches of Annwn,
it wets stealthily like dew,
damp opaque habergeon of the land. [...]*

Two religious texts deal with Gwyn ap Nudd as well: the *Life of St Collen* (*Buchedd Collen*) and a fragment in a text called *Speculum Christiani* (Roberts 1980/1).

Buchedd Collen

The earliest version of *Buchedd Collen*, the life (*vita*) of St Collen, dates back to 1536 (BC; Henken 1987; Henken 1991). In this *vita*, which is written rather late in comparison to other *vitae* of saints which typically date to the 12th century, the encounter of Gwyn ap Nudd and St Collen is described.

St Collen was Abbot of Glastonbury, but after some time he retreated into the wilderness, a typical resort for a saint, and tried to lead a contemplative life. This was disturbed by people who spoke about Gwyn in front of his door, crediting Gwyn with the title of a king of Annwn. But Collen reproached the people for talking about Gwyn, as he considered Gwyn to be no better than the devil. To make a long story short, Collen was finally summoned by Gwyn to appear on the summit of a hill at high noon. There he found a wonderful castle and Gwyn sitting on a golden chair; the knights and servants of the king all handsome and the king's men dressed in red and blue.

Collen, however, refused to eat, for he claimed the food was but the leaves of the trees. Moreover, he claimed that the red and blue of the king's men's clothes signified burning and coldness. Thereupon Collen started to spray holy water he had brought with him in a flask, and immediately found himself alone on the mountain top.

Though the tale shows Gwyn ap Nudd as a splendid king of Annwn, it is full of religious metaphors and is designed as a story of exorcism, considering Gwyn equal to a devil or a demon-king. The world of Gwyn is an illusionary one. In this the classical Welsh fairy-tale motif (Sikes 1880) meets with the medieval doctrine that the devils create illusions to divert the pious monks (diNola 1993, 224). The hour Gwyn ap Nudd summons Collen is the hour in which the '*daemonum meridianum*', 'the demon of high noon', is active, a demonic character believed to specialise in seducing monks to forfeit their pious life, as Evagrius Ponticus writes (third century A.D.). The interpretation of the colours red and blue as hellfire and coldness is actually based on the association of hell with both freezing and burning. This is an ancient idea; the Venerable Bede interpreted the words of the scripture 'weeping and gnashing of teeth' (Luke 13, 28) as twofold pains of hell resulting from an excess of heat and coldness respectively (BED).

All this is quite in accordance with the earlier tale *Culwch ac Olwen*, whose redactor classed the inhabitants of Annwn as devils. Moreover, if we follow Elissa Henken's suggestion that the Welsh saint takes the place of the hero of society (Henken 1987; Henken 1991), we see that Gwyn is again representing the powers and forces outside the God-given order of society.

It is the author of *Buchedd Collen* who locates Gwyn's realm at Glastonbury, a fact which has great consequences for the neo-pagan traditions of our time.

Speculum Christiani

The *Speculum Christiani* text, dating back to the 14th century (Roberts 1980/1), is the bridge to folklore, for it describes how the people invoked Gwyn ap Nudd in cases when illness was inflicted by means of the 'Evil Eye'. The text fragment as edited by Brinley Roberts reads (Roberts 1980/1):

Quidam etiam stulti et stulte cum aliquis egrotauerit vadunt ad hostium tenentes igne et ferrum in manibus suis et clamant ad regem Eumenidium et reginam eius qui sunt maligni spiritus sic dicentes. Gwynn ap Nwdd qui es ultra in silvis pro amore concubine tue permittite nos venire domum. In hoc stultissime agunt petendo auxilium a malis spiritibus qui non habent nisi dampnationem eternam contra clamat apostulus, Nolo vos socios esse demoniorum.

Some stupid people also stupidly go to the door holding fire and iron in the hands when someone has inflicted illness, and call to the king of the Benevolent Ones and his queen, who are evil spirits, saying: 'Gwyn ap Nudd who are far in the forests for the love of your mate allow us to come home'. In this they are acting most stupidly that they ask help of the evil spirits which have nothing but eternal damnation [and] against whom the Apostle cries out 'We do not want to be the fellows of the demons'. [transl. A.R.]

The author locates Gwyn's realm as '*ultra in silvis*', 'far in the forests'. Moreover, Gwyn can be moved by begging in the name of his love. Gwyn is addressed as '*Rex Eumenidum*', which is an *interpretatio Graeca* (Greek interpretation) of the nature of his subjects implying that they are avenging spirits who must be addressed with an appeasing name. 'Eumenides' is a classical Greek term which means literally the 'Benevolent Ones' or 'Gracious Ones' and was used to address the Erinyes, the avenging goddesses. The author of the *Speculum Christiani* text had most certainly a classical education and thus he seems to have translated the Welsh folk belief into a classical Greek term, for he seems to have looked for a term to translate '*plant Annwn*' into Greek or Latin.

This passage reinforces all information we have from the other sources: Gwyn is dwelling in the wilderness beyond the cultivated fields. In this context it is certainly worthwhile considering that J. Gwenogvryn Evans pointed out in the preface to his edition of the *Black Book of Carmarthen* (1922) that there existed an idea of locating *Annwn*, Gwyn's kingdom, in the forests of the North. Gwyn ap Nudd is filled by a deep reverence for his queen/mistress. His subjects are potentially dangerous and of great vindictiveness – a trait which is persistent for the Welsh Fair Folk and attested even after the name of their king vanished from folklore (Gruffudd 1958).

The *Speculum Christiani* text was written for the instruction of clerics. Actually it is the only source relating a folk custom – dimly outlined – involving Gwyn ap Nudd. This text and the references to Gwyn in poetry show that Gwyn must have played a role in Welsh folklore and oral tradition, and he must have been more widely known, for it would make no sense to use him as a reference point either in instructions for the clerics or in poetry if he was not widely known. However, Gwyn has totally vanished from folklore since then. The collectors of fairy folktales do not report any (new) fairy stories involving Gwyn (Rhys 1901; Sikes 1880; Thomas 1908; Evans-Wentz 1911; Owen 1887; Evans 1944). There are no tales or evidence in the sound archives of St Fagans, National History Museum of Wales, regarding Gwyn either (PC).

The images used in *Buchedd Collen* probably hold the key for understanding Gwyn's disappearance. With the meaning of 'Annwn' changing from 'Otherworld' to 'Hell', he might have been absorbed into the traditional figures and names used for the Christian devil. The way in which fairies are depicted in *Buchedd Collen* is of great similarity to their description in *Gweledigaethau y Bardd Cwsg* (*The Visions of the Sleeping Bard*, 1703) by Ellis Wynne (Wynne 1998). The fairies of Ellis Wynne perform their activities on a 'twmpath' (hillock; mound) ('tumpath chwarae' precisely, which denotes a village green or playing field (GPC)). The castle of Gwyn was also located on a 'tumpath', a hillock, according to *Buchedd Collen*, which uses this special expression and also reports about the red and blue garments of Gwyn's subjects. But in Wynne's text they are called subjects to Belial, who is described as *Tywysog Annwn* (Prince of Annwn), and Lucifer is given the same title, whereas Gwyn was known as *Brenin Annwn* – King of Annwn. These titles are close enough in meaning to suggest that Gwyn's name was dropped in favour of the conventional Christian names for the Devil.

The time of Romanticism (19th and early 20th centuries)

We do not find any new sources related to Gwyn until the time of the Classical Revival in the 18th century. At that time the medieval bardic traditions had completely ended, but the idea of bringing classical learning into Welsh literature was continued from the time of the Renaissance. Leaving behind the Renaissance interest for discovering only objective truths, antiquarians, Iolo Morganwg among them, tried to recreate the Welsh past in a new romantic image (Johnston 1999). In the time of the Classical Revival, Iolo Morganwg styled him in a Triad into one of 'the blessed astronomers' of the Isle of Britain (MYV).

Tri Gwyn Seronyddion ynys Pridain:

Idris Gawr, a Gwydion mab Don, a Gwyn ap Nudd;

A chan faint eu gwybodau am y ser a'u haniau a'i hansoddau y darogenynt

a chwennydd ei wybod hyd yn nydd brawd.

*Three blessed astronomers of the Isle of Britian:
Idris the giant, and Gwydion mab Don, and Gwyn ap Nudd,
And so great was their knowledge about the stars and their nature and
their qualities that they prophesied that which one desired to know
until the day of doom.*

While we can speculate as to the origin of this idea, it is important to remember that Iolo is known to have invented a great amount of material which he then presented as 'traditional'. Thus, this idea may be based on the existence of a Neolithic earthwork and the remains of a Bronze Age stone circle on Ynys Môn (Anglesey) called 'Bryn Gwyn' in the proximity of a stone called 'astronomer stone' (Nicholson 1840). These remains from the past are discussed in Henry Rowlands' *Mona Antiqua Restorata* (Rowlands 1766). Ynys Môn was known to have been a stronghold of the druids in pre-Roman times (Tacitus, *Annales* XIV, 30; TAA). Another element contributing to Iolo's ideas might be the tradition that the fairies are the souls of the druids, as related by W.Y. Evans-Wentz (1911) and Sikes (1880).

During the literary revival in the late 19th and early 20th centuries Elfed wrote his famous poem *Gwyn ap Nudd* (1895) which gave Gwyn back to literature (Elfed 1920; Williams 1978) and, even more, remembered all the old sources in Welsh language, as the poem expands on them. Elfed calls Gwyn ap Nudd 'Tywysog pob direidi', 'Prince of all mischief', evoking the vindictiveness and potential danger associated with the Fair Folk in folk beliefs (cf. also Gruffudd 1958, second paragraph). In this and in associating Gwyn with nature the poem is grounded in genuine Welsh tradition regarding Gwyn ap Nudd.

Another romantic poem, *The Fairie's Song* by John Jenkins, also mentions Gwyn ap Nudd, but in a rather patriotic role and presiding over feasting and dancing fairies in the moonlight (Jenkins 1873). Thus Gwyn ap Nudd is brought closer to the Victorian idea of miniature fairies.

A late product of this new romanticism is certainly a piano concerto by J. Holbrooke based on a text by T.E. Ellis (Lord Howard de Walden) named 'The Song of Gwyn ap Nudd'. The central theme is the yearly combat of Gwyn and Gwythyr for Creiddylad (ELL).

Sir John Rhys (1840-1915)

In the 19th century research in Celtic Studies strengthened, and Sir John Rhys, a Welsh scholar, became the first Professor of Celtic at Oxford University. This formidable pioneer in the field of collecting folklore and research in Celtic Studies would have a profound impact upon the image of Gwyn ap Nudd ('this repellent personage', as Rhys called him (Rhys, 1888, 560)) like no other.

It is consistent with Gwyn's disappearance from folklore that there are almost no references to Gwyn in Sir John Rhys's great work on Celtic folklore, *Celtic Folklore – Welsh and Manx* (1901).

But there are a great number in his *Studies in the Arthurian Legend* (1991) and in *Lectures on the Origin and Growth of Religion as illustrated by Celtic Heathendom* (1888).

In accordance with the fashion of the time, he believed it was possible to rediscover the deities of the pre-Christian time in disguise in the Arthurian tales. Moreover, his work was strongly guided by a comparative assessment of mythology in which the Roman and Greek mythology represented a sort of implicit standard.

Searching for a Celtic Hades and knowledge of Welsh folk beliefs, but certainly also the shift of meaning of Annwn from 'otherworld' to 'hell', and in a further interpretation to 'abyss, Hades', finally led Sir John Rhys to mistranslate and misread the earliest source, the poem from the *Black Book*. I could discuss a number of distortions of the original text in his translation, but I will focus here on those with the greatest impact. Rhys translates the words of Gwyn, who is coming from a battle and lamenting the warriors of the Old North with the words 'I am [alive], they [are] in the grave' (*Mi. wi wiw. vintev y bet*), as 'I am the escort of the grave' (Rhys 1891, 383). This and the fact that Gwyn is coming from a battle he has taken part in, telling about other battles he has been present at, is sufficient for Rhys to style Gwyn a psychopomp, a God of carnage, a Hades. The other distortions are the misreading of Gwyn's dog's name, 'Dormarch', as '*Dormarth*' and translating this as 'Death's Door' (Rhys 1891, 155-6) based on a spurious etymology – an idea already contested by J. Gwenogvryn Evans and Professor Foster (Evans 1922; Foster 1953). Rhys ignores the white horse of Gwyn and neglects the connotation of the term 'gwyn' as 'blessed', reducing it to the colour 'white' (Rhys 1888, 84), and interprets this as the white of winter, death and mourning. However, in the saga poetry 'gwyn' is often found as an epithet of the formidable hero, e.g. *Pwyll Wyn, Cai Wyn, Cynddylan Wyn*, also *Seiriol Wyn*, a saint's name, and even the expression Christ Wyn can be found.

As for the tale *Culwch ac Olwen*, Rhys focused much on the idea that Gwyn is riding the black sea-going horse Du y Moroedd on the boar hunt. The Welsh folk belief that the devil is able to manifest as a black horse (Rhys 1891, 70) is used by Rhys to corroborate Gwyn ap Nudd's image as a sinister character. He also believed he had discovered that Gwyn was the representative of the winter season, as he thought Gwyn's opponent Gwythyr to be a 'solar deity' in disguise (Rhys 1888, 561).

In Arthurian legend Rhys associated Gwyn largely with several characters all linked to the idea of the 'waste land' as realm of death and destruction (Rhys 1891, 120), but he also understood Gwyn to be an equivalent to Melwas, the king of the 'Summerland', based on the theme of the abduction of a lady, Queen Gwenhyfar, and that Melwas's stronghold was Glastonbury (Rhys 1891, 342).

He understood St Michael as a Christian replacement of Gwyn, due to his function as psychopomp (Rhys 1891, 341) and leader of a host – a fact which comes over as a certain contrast to the former, darkened image of Gwyn.

In his *Lectures on the Origin and Growth of Religion as illustrated by Celtic Heathendom*, he even equates him to Pluto, Cernunnos and Heimdallr, postulating for the first time a similarity to a horned deity (Rhys 1888, 84). These ideas were taken up by Charles Squire and have found and find quite a far distribution (Squire 2003, 254).

Robert Graves (1895-1985)

Robert Graves makes use of Celtic tradition in a way that is strongly biased by his pre-knowledge of Greek, Roman and Oriental mythology. Moreover, he seems to be influenced by the ideas of Frazer (Frazer 2003) about the dying God and by the ideas of the Cambridge Ritualists (Doty 2000, 337).

As a consequence, the yearly combat of Gwyn and Gwythyr for Creiddylad at the calends of May (*Calan Mai*) until the day of doom was the piece of information about Gwyn ap Nudd which would fit him into Graves' monomyth of the two heroes/gods competing for the threefold goddess in a seasonal combat (Graves 1975). He takes this core motive from *Culhwch ac Olwen* and, by focusing on this simple and widespread plot – namely two men fighting for a (divine) female, he successfully adapts Gwyn into his monomyth and opens the way for a rather wide syncretism by suggesting a few missing details.

He invents death and a burial rite for Gwyn as a dead hero (Graves 1975, 179), joins him in a Triad with characters of the Fourth Branch of the Mabinogi, Lleu and Dylan (Graves 1975, 321), and this finally makes Gwyn equal to the dying vegetation deities of ancient Greece and the ancient Near East, such as Dionysos, Osiris, Attis and Tammuz. He claims Gwyn to be equivalent to Osiris. Moreover, he is now fused into a 'white' threefold-god and is simultaneously linked to Gwythyr in an indissoluble dualism.

Gerald Gardner (1884-1964)

Gerald Gardner is one of the glamorous figures in the history of neo-paganism and played a crucial role in the development of Wicca (Hutton 1999). Gwyn ap Nudd is assigned a key role by Gardner, who sees in him the 'God of the Witches' as leader of the Spectral Hunt. Gardner states Gwyn ap Nudd to be 'one of the most famous of his [the god of the witches] names' (Gardner 2004, 145).

It is very obvious that Gardner is drawing strongly on the ideas of Sir John Rhys, but he takes things even further than Rhys and Graves. If Gwyn had been a god of death for Rhys, Gardner made him over into a 'God of Death and Resurrection' (Gardner 2004, 146), and if Gwyn was in Graves' monomyth subjected to death and resurrection, he is now the lord guiding the souls from and into life in our world. The god of the witches is also understood as a character holding a dualism of features, and Gardner assigns the aspect of the Dark God to Gwyn, and associates

him clearly with the realm of death (Gardner 2004, 147). Indeed, the god of the witches in general rules over death, winter and autumn (Gardner 2008). His life-engendering aspect is acknowledged, but not equally stressed compared with his destructive side (Gardner 2004, 150), which is all in all a clear repetition of the ideas of Sir John Rhys.

Gwyn as an equivalent to Horus seems to be a new idea introduced by Gardner. Moreover, a central issue is the fact that Glastonbury should be Gwyn's abode according to *Buchedd Colleen*. Gardner postulates Glastonbury to be the home of a (prehistoric) pre-Christian witch cult (Gardner 2004, 146).

Conclusions and consequences

From the given evidence we see that there is a set of medieval and early modern sources which, when investigated and explored, can be shown to have given rise to secondary sources. At the same time the authors of these secondary sources 'process' the given information considerably, thus changing features of Gwyn ap Nudd. This results in a change of both the characteristics attributed to him and a strong conceptual change.

The new attributes he is equipped with are most easily detected when skimming over the output of booklets and leaflets offered at places like Glastonbury, i.e. places which are strongly connected with Gwyn, or by skimming over the neo-pagan pages on the internet. We find attributes like 'Dark God', 'Guardian of the Doors between the Worlds', 'Winter King/God of Summer', 'Horned God', 'Welsh Angel of Death', etc. All those titles are certainly not supported by the early sources. The only attribute surviving almost undisturbed is that of the hunter.

Moreover, Gwyn is subjected to a significant conceptual change by Graves and Gardner. Graves assigns him the role of one of the protagonists in the seasonal ritual drama, a constructive element for an agrarian society. Gardner introduces him as 'God of the Witches', a character playing a key role in the religious rituals of Wicca, thus supporting the religious structure of a social group sharing this faith.

However, these are functions which cannot be reconciled with a character who is a member of the 'World of the Outlaw', representing the counter-concept to society. Such a character will be in conflict with the representatives of established religion (pagan or Christian) rather than supporting it (Nagy 1985, 83/4).

Even taking into account that Gwyn is assigned a destructive element in the tale *Culhwch ac Olwen*, he is by no means a Hades or a god mediating the transit of souls from and into the Otherworld as Gardner wants to see him, for this would make Gwyn a character who is upholding 'this world' as it is and in which death plays its part. In *Culhwch ac Olwen*, however, Gwyn is obviously a character who symbolises the end of all things, and certainly the ritual-accompanied circles of birth, life and death, and in this his title *Brenin Annwn*, King of the Non-

World, describes things rather accurately, as 'an-' is a prefix which can negate so that a possible interpretation of the Welsh term Annwn is 'an+dwfn' = 'Non-World' (GPC; Koch 2006).

We can see that this modern understanding of Gwyn is actually very far from the image the original Welsh sources suggested, which depicts Gwyn as a typical ruler of the 'Non-World', a figure ultimately in contrast to the well-ordered human sphere and strange to any ritual integral to the religion of society and the world of men.

The idea that the world of the Fair Folk is a contrast to the human world may have actually been deeply rooted in the original Welsh folklore, as illustrated by the *Itinerarium Cambriae* (*Journey through Wales*, 1191) by Giraldus Cambrensis (Gerald of Wales) (IC).

The presbyter Elidorus relates – according to Gerald of Wales – that the Fair Folk have no religious cult, but only have truth as their religion: they do not take oaths, they do not lie, they have no sun nor moon. Their world is a counter-concept to the world of men, who of course have a religion, take oaths, lie, violate the truth and live in the light of sun and moon.

Gwyn ap Nudd can be explained against this background in all his ambiguity. We are shown a peerless hero, a wise counsellor, an outstanding hunter-warrior with supernatural powers, a splendid king; an ardent lover on the one hand, on the other hand vindictive, dangerous, even cruel; he takes people and leads the fearsome Spectral Hunt, and in all those characteristics he exceeds the human measure of things, the measure of 'this world'.

With these lines which have led us back to the image of Gwyn from the early Welsh sources, I will close this concise analysis of the most important changes Gwyn has been subject to during the last 900 years, a process which is still going on, for Gwyn is again increasingly the subject of art and literature due to the strengthening of neo-pagan beliefs.

In general, monitoring this process might be a model study to help us understand better the processes to which fictional/mythological characters may be subjected. It might also encourage a critical assessment of the ways in which fictional characters are interpreted today and have been interpreted in the past.

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Dr Angelika H. Rüdiger

Abbreviations

- BC Hafod MS 19, fol. 141 ff (written in 1536); Llanstephan MS 117, fol. 183, (1544-52), Lanst. MS 34, fol. 315 (copied by Roger Morys, towards the end of 16th cent.), Llanst. 18, fol. 25; Cardiff MS 36, fol 377, National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth
- Hafod MS 19 published in *Lives of the British Saints* (Baring-Gould and Fisher), VI, 375. Y Greal (London, 1805-7), pp.337-41.
- 'Rhyddiaith Gymraeg', *Y Gyferol Gyntaf, Detholion o Lawsgrifau (1488-1609)*, Caerdydd, Gwasg Prifysgol Cymru, 1954, pp.36-41.
- BED Beda Venerabilis, *In Lucae Evangelium Expositio* lib. iv cap xxiii 55.

- DAG Dafydd ap Gwilym: <http://www.dafyddapgwilym.net/> (28.02.2011)
- ELL 'The Song of Gwyn ap Nudd', poem by T.E. Ellis for Pianoforte & Orchestra. Op. 52. Material added to the publishing of 'The song of Gwyn ap Nudd' by Hyperion. Records in the series 'The Romantic Piano concerto, Vol. 23'
- GPC Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru <http://www.wales.ac.uk/dictionary/> (09.08.2012)
- IC 'Itinerarium Cambriae, seu laboriosae Balduini Cantuariensis archiepiscopi per William legationis accurate description auctore S. Giraldo Cambrense. Cum annotationibus D. Poweli. (vita Girali Cambrensis ex ejus scriptis, Ielando et Baleo collecta.) [edited by Sir R. C. Hoare, Bart.]', British Library, Historical Print Editions
- MWG D.S. Evans, *A Grammar of Middle Welsh*, The School of Celtic Studies Dublin Institute For Advanced Studies 1989
- MYV Owen Jones, Edward Williams, and Williams Owen Pughe, 'Myvyrian Archaiology of Wales', Denbigh 1870, Thomas Gee
<http://archive.org/stream/myvyrianarchaiol00joneuoft#page/n5/mode/2up> (25.03.2012)
- PC Personal communication from Dr R. Gwyndaff after a request at the Welsh National Museum for Folklore at St Fagan's
- TAA P. Cornelius Tacitus, *Annales*; source text: <http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/tac.html> (10.09.2012)

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www.gwynapnudd.com

www.glastonbury-pilgrim.co.uk/gwyn-ap-nudd.php [Winter King]

www.terrapsych.com/gods.html [god of hunt and fallen warriors]

www.oppapers.com/essays/Hades-And-Gwynn-Ap-Nudd/641995

www.celt.net.org.uk/gods_g/gwyn.html [Welsh angel of Death]

www.kathyjones.co.uk/glastonburygoddess.html [Gwyn riding at Midsummer time]

www.cyberwitch.com/Wychwood/PlantBran/tax.htm

<http://tribes.tribe.net/gwynapnudd/thread/b7440456-735e-461e-9656-bb498bcb3fed> [Gwyn god of summer]



Margaret Jones,
*The Quest for
Olwen*, p.49.