

Mhara Starling:

So I've always been excited about fairies all of my life. I've always loved fairies, all things fairies. I remember my first day at primary school. Tiny little school, only 25 students in total. And I remember my first ever day I sat there and the head mistress and the teacher that was teaching me, they came and they looked over me and I have this vivid memory of their faces looking down at me, like giants above me. And they went, "what is it that you like?" And I looked at them and I went, "fairies, mermaids, a witches." Essentially, "I like fairies, mermaids and witches." And they scolded me and they went, "Don't you know the Welsh words for those things?" So they told to me, they said, "Tylwyth teg, morforynion, a gwyrachod."

And I was like hooked ever since. And they would take me into the little library section that we had at school and they would give me all the advice on which stories I should read that were to do with fairies and mermaids and witches, because those were my things for so very long. And I became just obsessed with reading these stories, specifically stories that were associated with the land of Anglesey I was growing up in. So not only did we have numerous, numerous books in the school that talked about the ways in which the people of Wales used to interact with fairies on the daily, but I also had local stories. There was a hill just behind my house called Bryn y Tylwyth Teg, and it was called Bryn y Tylwyth Teg because there was this big concrete thing, very phallic in shape that was up on the top of the hill.

Apparently, it's just to tell you that it's the highest point of the village. But throughout the local village lore people always said, "No, that's just a house where fairies live." There was a little hole in the top and everyone used to say, "The fairies, they climb up to the top of it and they slide down and that's where they live." So I grew up immersed in these stories of the tylwyth teg, the fairies of Wales. So today's talk is coming from a place of passion because even as I grew into a teenager, I was referred to as a Welsh fairy, though I don't think people meant it nicely. So, hopefully that worked. Yes. So this is what we'll be exploring today. We'll be looking at the beliefs and lore concerning fairies within a Welsh context. So I'll give you a little bit of an insight into what is Welsh fairy lore and how does it differ from other beliefs surrounding fairies.

We'll also be looking at Welsh fairy terminology. Now I have a YouTube channel, and if you've ever been on my YouTube channel, you'll know that I'm obsessed with words. I love looking into the etymology of words and where they come from. So I like to geek out over the words that we ascribe to certain things. And I think within a folkloric sense, you can glean a lot of information about something based on what it's called. You can get so many stories, especially in the Welsh language, I've found, because we describe things in a very descriptive manner. So for example, ladybugs within Welsh are buwch goch gota, which is just a short red cow. So it gives you a little bit of an idea of what the thing is. And it's the same with fairies, as you will discover later in this presentation. We'll also talk about how Welsh folk have interacted with fairies throughout history.

So fairies were not some distant thing that people didn't understand. Throughout folklore, you'll notice that fairies and humans live side by side and there's numerous interactions between us. And we'll talk a little bit about that, not just specifically about how the common ordinary people interacted with them, but also how magicians interacted with them because then we'll move on to talk a little bit about how throughout Welsh folk belief and folklore, there was this deeply rooted belief in the idea that fairies and magicians and witches worked in tandem with each other. So we'll delve into that a bit later. And then we'll also talk about some folk magical traditions, beliefs, and practices concerning the fairies. So where shall we start? So Welsh fairies, what exactly are Welsh fairies? So if I were to say the word fairy to you and you were to instantly conjure in your mind a very small, very pretty little girl with wings or a very sassy blonde from the Peter Pan movies, that's not quite the types of fairies we're talking about today.

So fairies within Welsh folk belief do not tend to be tiny little pretty flower fairies. That Victorian kind of image that we see in Mary Cicely Barker's work and such, that's kind of not found within Welsh folklore. I often get people coming to me because like I said, I'm like a rash. So once you've see me once, you'll see me everywhere and I'm across all the social medias. I like to keep it down with the kids. So I am on TikTok, and every now and then I'll say the phrase, "Fairies within Welsh folklore are not the small sprit-like winged creatures. That's not what they look like and that's not what we're referring to when we say fairy within a Welsh context." I'll often get people, usually Americans messaging me going, "So what do you call those things, then? What would you call the little sprightly things with wings?"

And I have to disappoint them by going, "Nothing, because we just don't have them." They're just not apparent within our folk tales, they're very different things to what we perceive as fairies. So what are fairies then? If they're not these sprightly tiny little things with wings dancing on the flower petals, what are they? That's a bit harder to answer because it depends on what exactly you are looking at. Fairy is essentially an umbrella term, and it's not even the term that we use in our native language, it's just the word I'm using in English now to make it easier, to make it easy to understand. And like I said, we will be talking about Welsh fairy terminology a little later. So for ease's sake, let's say that fairy is an umbrella term that encapsulates numerous different folkloric beings that exist within our streams of tradition.

They exist within our Celtic cultural continuum, and they tend to vary in size, in shape, in appearance, in how they express themselves to us. Most of the time they look exactly like us. They don't look any different to how we look. There might be something about them that makes you go, "Ooh, this one's not quite all there. Something's a bit strange about this one." They might have a strange eye color or they might have a strange hair color. They might be really bloody tall or really short. And we do see fairies that are small within Welsh folklore, but they're never really any smaller than about the size of a child. They're not the tiny little insect like creatures that we see in TV and film nowadays. The smallest you'll see of them is like little ankle biters that come near you. So the fairies within our folklore tend to be very similar to us, and it's a good thing that they are, because a lot of humans have this habit of mating with them, of going off with them.

I can't imagine doing that with Tinkerbell, can you? Quite awkward. But yes, they tend to look quite like us. And throughout various folkloric texts, throughout various stories that are shared, throughout various oral traditions, their appearance is very much as diverse as human appearance. So you'll often find people online talking about fairies and they'll say, "Oh, they're tremendously beautiful. They're these tall elvin creatures with long blonde hair and they're gorgeous." That's some of them. Some of them definitely look like that. But there are others that I described, and it's one of my absolute favorites. There's this story that is oriented around a lake. And this guy one day is walking and he must have been bloody drunk. I nearly swore there. I got children in the room, I shouldn't do that. There's this guy and he must be really drunk because he's walking and he falls into the lake.

I don't know about you, but when I see water, I think I shouldn't walk there because I'm not Jesus. So this guy, he falls into the lake and he finds himself plummeting and plummeting and plummeting deeper into the lake until eventually it doesn't feel like he's sinking in water. It feels like he's flying through the air and he's falling from the sky. And he comes down and suddenly he starts slowing down and he's almost floating magically ethereally down to this place. And he notices, there's like a city beneath him, there's a city below him, and he's looking at this city and thinking, "Ooh, this is a nice place." And he lands and this fairy comes up to him and welcomes him and asks him what he's doing there. And how do they describe this fairy? Short, fat, ugly man. That's how he's described. So very far cry from the tall, ethereal elvin Lord of the Ring types.

So as you can guess from that, fairies tend to be really diverse in the way that they express themselves within the folklore. And we also have different types of fairies, as I said, big umbrella term. So we have

some that match the more Brian Froud imagery, if you know what I mean by that. Like something out of The Labyrinth or Dark Crystal. We have those types. But for the most part, fairies are either human-like or they're very animalistic in their appearance. So they don't tend to look like Tinkerbell, and that's something that needs to stick in your mind when we are going through this talk. But what's important is to note is that there is usually something quite odd about them. There's something that makes them very much othered within our minds.

The easiest way to describe fairies is that they are liminal entities who are otherworldly in their origin usually, or they are spirit-adjacent beings who dwell within our landscape. And we'll get deeper into that as we go along. But let me now tell you a little bit about a guy called Eledorus. Eledorus is his Latin name and I prefer his Welsh name, Eledyr. Now, Eledorus was a priest who lived in around the 12th century. And around the 12th century there was this guy called Gerald. Gerallt, we called him in Wales. Gerallt Cymro. Gerald, you might know him, Gerald of Wales, Giraldus Cambrensis. And he went around. I don't know if many of you watch a lot of YouTube videos, but you know how you have travel vloggers nowadays? People who go around with cameras and they tell you like, "I'm in Thailand, look at me, I'm having fun in Thailand."

Gerald of Wales was basically that, but for the 12th century. So he went around Wales and he documented his journey in a book called An Itinerary Through Wales. And he talked about all these different amazing people that he met, the ways in which he romanticized the Welsh in general. He even talked about some soothsayers or prophets called Awenyddion, which are really fascinating. But specifically what I want to talk about today is this dude, Eledorus. So he went to this monastery and he met a guy called Eledorus. And the other monks were all telling him, "Eledorus, he had a really weird childhood. He grew up with the fairies and then he came to us, he came to the church later on in his life, but he lived for an entire period of his life in his childhood with the fairies." And Gerald of Wales recorded the entire story.

And the story went that one day Eledorus was being scolded by his mother, and his mother turned around with a shoe in hand ready to smack him, and he ran out the door, he was like, "Nope, not having any of that." So he ran out and he went to hide by the river and he hid there for two days. He didn't let anyone find him. The usual as kids do, going, "I'm going to run away from home." Because they don't like what's going on at home. He did that to the extreme and stayed at this river's edge for two days. And every time he heard someone coming who had been looking for him for all these two days, he would hide and make sure they did not find him. Eventually he started getting hungry and he thought about going home, but just as he did these two little fellows, these two short little men, as he described them, came up to him and said, "We've got all this glorious food, we've got amazing things in our world. Why don't you come live with us?"

And they took him through a door that was at the edge of this river into an otherworld chthonic realm. They went into this underground realm where it's described as constantly looking as though it is twilight 24/7, there's mist that covers the land all the time. And all the people there are short, they're all very small, and it describes their size by saying they have horses that are about the size of greyhounds. So that gives you kind of an estimate for how small these people were. But this place was full of riches. They ate the most amazing food, the most sweet, amazing delicacies. They drank milk that was sweetened and filled with saffron, and they had so many riches in this place. They had balls made of gold that they just gave to their children to play with. Whole balls made of gold that the children were just kicking about, like they were normal, ordinary plastic balls that you get from B&M.

And these people, they were quite sweet, quite nice. They were all vegetarians apparently. And they said to him, "While you're here, you can't go home. So you can stay with us as long as you want, but once you go home, that's it. You can't." And he stayed there for about a year until eventually his mother

was in his heart and he was thinking, "Oh gosh, I probably should go see her." So he asked the king of this realm permission, he asked, "Can I please go see my mom just for a little bit?" And he said, "All right, you can go see your mum, but you can't take anything from this otherworldly realm with you. You have to just go, say hi to her, and come straight back." And he did just that. His mother at first was a bit like, "Oh, I thought you were dead." Not dead obviously.

And his mother must have been a very terrible person because rather than being happy that her son was back, the first thing she thought was, "Golden balls? Can you get me one of those?" And she convinced him to go and get one of these golden balls for her. And he left the next day from this otherworldly realm to go see his mother again with a golden ball tucked under his shirt. Next thing he knows is he's got a bunch of these little men running after him, chasing him. So he runs and eventually he falls over, the ball falls out of his shirt, the little men come, they take the ball so his mother doesn't get the golden ball in the end. And then he's never allowed to go back to this realm again. He can never find the doorway into this realm again. And this story gives us a glimpse into one of the earliest fairy stories from Wales.

It's one of the earliest evidence of some kind of fairy story, even though throughout the entire story which was transcribed down in Latin, they never once used the word fairy. But we can glean that there's a lot of things within this story that then influenced the fairy tradition. So the idea that the fairies live in an otherworldly chthonic realm beyond our own, a place that is constantly twilight, a place that is covered in mist, the idea that their realm is a realm of riches where there's glorious things always, and the idea that they're small. We see all of these things in later fairy tradition. They just made their way from Eledorus down into other folkloric traditions.

So now that we've done that, let me geek out a little bit with you about some Welsh terminology, Welsh fairy terminology. Now, can I just ask quickly, are there any people here who speak Welsh? Apart from you, obviously. No one? That's it. Oh gosh, do we have Welsh people here at least? Yay, lovely. So if you speak Welsh or if you're immersed in a Welsh culture, the term that you've probably heard the most associated with fairies is tylwyth teg, which is this one up here, tylwyth teg. So I'll say that one more time and if you can repeat it after me, so tylwyth teg.

Yeah, it's a lovely word, isn't it? It's glorious. I love it. So that's one of the words that we have to describe fairies. And this, if anything, this slide full of words shows you just how immersed into our culture, the belief in fairies is because we've got so many bloody words for them, we can't just call them one thing, they have to have various other names. Tylwyth teg is the most prominent term nowadays, but it's not the only one and it's not the only one that's even used today in the modern Welsh language. Some of these terms on the screen describe a specific type of being. So for example, whilst tylwyth teg is more of another umbrella term, it's kind of like the Welsh equivalent to fairy. Other terms on this list, however, are more specific.

So for example, the coblynau. The coblynau are not an umbrella, they're a specific type of creature. You might notice the word looks similar to goblin, but don't let that fool you because they're not really goblins. The coblynau are the spirits of the mine. That's how they're described in most folktales. They are the spirits that are associated with the mines because of course, coming from Wales, we would have spirits associated with mines. They're sometimes described as being a little goblin-like in appearance, but other times they're completely invisible. You don't see them at all. You just hear them. You can hear their phantom pickaxes and shovels beneath the earth. A lot of cultures across the world nowadays, but especially here in Britain, various other cultures have similar means to the coblynau or the mining spirits. So you might have heard things like the tommyknockers or the mining fairies, things like this across other cultures and traditions, especially in places like Cornwall and other parts of England.

But indifference to most of those and especially indifference to the mining fairies that we see across the Atlantic at the Appalachian regions, they've got their own version of kind of mining goblins. They're quite scary, they're awful, they're nasty people. You don't want to interact with them. Whereas the coblynau in Welsh tradition are benevolent. They're not horrible things. They're actually good. They usually appear, or you can hear them as a miner because they're trying to lead you to good or they're trying to lead you to riches essentially. So they're really good and people used to leave offerings for them in the mines. Another example is bwabach, right down here, that's a bit of a mouthful for anyone who doesn't speak Welsh. Bwabach is a term to describe the household fairy. So it's describing a type of fairy that lives within the household with you. And people would often leave offerings to this household fairy on the hob or near the hearth, and they would hope that the fairy would help them in some capacity.

They would either clean for them, they would find the money, they would do all sorts of nice deeds for them in return for them keeping a clean and warm house and leaving them offerings of things like cream and cheese. They really love dairy products. So that's another very specific type. Like I said, some on this list, very specific. Others not quite as specific. Some of them are really weird terms. So if you speak Welsh and you see this one which is Plant Rhys Ddwfn, you'll know as a Welsh speaker there that translates to the Children of Rhys the Deep, which is a bit weird. Who's Rhys and why is he deep? I don't know. So Plant Rhys Ddwfn is a term that comes from the south of Wales and it refers to the children of a king of a location that was once in South Wales but has now been flooded.

So there's a lot of fairy traditional beliefs that state that fairies come from the Otherworld, obviously. And sometimes especially within Welsh tradition, the Otherworld is either found on islands across the sea or specifically under the sea. So another variation of Plant Rhys Ddwfn that we find is Plant Annwn. Now I've spelled that Plant Annwn because Annwn, this word here, is the word you're most likely to come across if you're looking into the idea of the Otherworld within Welsh folk belief. Usually I don't spell it like that. I spell it with an F before the N. Because being a Welsh speaker, I like to try and pull out these etymological roots of these words.

Now, Annwfn as a term, essentially one theory surrounding the meaning of Annwfn is that an at the beginning is an intensifying prefix and wfn, or nwfn, after that is a suffix that implies depth, implies something deep, because in modern Welsh today we still say the word dwfn or dyfn, to describe something that is deep, like a deep lake or a deep hole. It's something that's dwfn. So Annwfn if you think of it like that, it's an intensifying prefix and then a suffix that means depth. It essentially means the very deep, the very, very deep. So another way we can look at names like Plant Annwfn to describe the fair folk of Wales is that they're essentially the children who originate from the depths. They come from the depths. So these are just some phrases that you might have come across and we might talk a little bit in more depth to them later. Some of them, like I said, like Puka and Gwyddion. I put Gwyddion there twice. Oh, I was tired when I did this.

And corrach is a fun one. So this one here, corrach is essentially the Welsh version of dwarf. Something short, something small. And you will see the word cor, which means dwarf or short in the word for corgi. Corgi, the dogs. Because corgi is essentially a Welsh term that just means small dog or short dog. And they're very much associated with fairies in modern kind of fairy folklore in Wales. But we won't get into that. I've got a YouTube video on that. You can go subscribe to me there. So some of them, like I said, specific terms, Puka, Gwyddion, Corrach, which we'll get into later. The other ones are just kind of blanket terms to describe the denizens of the Otherworld, the people who come from the Otherworld like the Tylwyth Teg. They're all very interesting and I very much recommend looking them up. So what's next? So let's look specifically at the most common term that we come across, which is tylwyth teg. So it is the most common term used today.

People use it in the same way that we use fairy in English. You'll just use it to describe anything that is fairy in nature. It translates to essentially mean the fair family or the fair tribe or the fair host. There's a lot of different ways we can translate it. So the teg bit at the end, we still use the word teg today in modern Welsh, it just means fair. So we'll say things like "Chwarae teg." Which just means, "Fair play." So teg just means fair. But tylwyth is a bit more complicated because it's an older Welsh term that we don't use anymore. We don't use the word tylwyth, but we do use its more modern version, which is teulu. So teulu and tylwyth have the same etymological root and teulu means family, but it can also mean tribe and it can also mean warband and it can also mean host and it can also mean genus, like do you know how we talk about the genus of animals and such?

So it might be the fair family, it might be the fair host, the fair warband, or it might be the fair genus, the fair beings, those who are fair. Now, does the fact they're called fair beings, fair folk, fair family, mean that they're all fair and good and honest and wonderful? I will answer that question by explaining like this. The Greeks had these beings in their tradition called the... Is it Eumenides? The Eumenides, which translates to the kindly ones. Are they kind? No, because they're the bloody furies. So they called them the kindly ones in order to kind of supplicate them, to make them nicer, because if you called them something nasty, they might be nasty right back to you because they had the potential to be nasty to you. So the belief is that words like tylwyth teg, which is the fair family, is less of a descriptive term, calling them fair because they actually are fair and more of a kind of euphemism that was used to protect yourself.

You call them the tylwyth teg because if they hear you call them the nasty things that come out of the holes in the ground, they might eat your face off. We also have another term from down in South Wales which is translated as the blessings of the mother, which serves the same function. It's a euphemism so that we treat them nicely in case they're listening. There was a belief that fairies could either hear anything that was set upon the wind, so they might hear you if you spoke poorly of them or that they could travel invisibly. We see this in a lot of market-based folklore where sometimes someone would say something nasty about the fairies and then end up blind and they don't know why, and it's because there was a fairy behind them at the time completely invisible and they heard him and they went blindness instantly. So people wanted to make sure they were nice to the tylwyth teg.

Now I've put a random poet upon this slideshow called Dafydd ap Gwilym, which might seem really, really random because he is just this amazing poet from Welsh history, one of the greatest poets of the bardic tradition, according to some Welsh people. And the reason he's up here is because he has a fairy association, and that is in the phrase tylwyth teg. So the word tylwyth teg, we don't find it within Welsh writing until the 14th century. There's no written format of the word tylwyth teg anywhere until the 14th century. And the first person to use tylwyth teg was not Dafydd ap Gwilym, it was someone pretending to be him. But Dafydd ap Gwilym did use the word tylwyth in relation to fairies. A lot of Dafydd ap Gwilym's poems have to do with nature, the natural world and the magic of the natural world.

And he describes things like the mist as being very much a thing of Gwyn ap Nudd than the fairies. So within Dak Williams's work, you won't find the phrase tylwyth teg, but you will find the phrase tylwyth Gwyn or Gwyn a'i dylwyth, you'll find. Gwyn and his dylwyth, which is a reference to a figure we'll talk about in a second called Gwyn ap Nudd. And he's essentially saying the fairies are the host, the warband or the family or the tribe of Gwyn ap Nudd. So it was a poet pretending to be Dafydd ap Gwilym in an apocryphal poet that came later after his time that then used the words tylwyth teg and that's where we get to the phrase. So just because... Oh, actually we'll go into Gwyn first. So who is Gwyn and why would the tylwyth teg be associated with him? I'll give you a quick run through because I'm scared that I'm going to run over my time.

But Gwyn ap Nudd, there's essentially this character from Welsh medieval literature. His earliest kind of appearance comes from a text found in Llyfr Du Caerfyrddin, the Black Book of Carmarthen. There's a poem which is a conversation between this guy Gwyn ap Nudd and another guy. And in that poem it is implied that Gwyn ap Nudd is some kind of psycho pomp. He's some kind of strange liminal being who wanders the battlefields and talks to people as they're about to die or as they're crossing over into death. So that's the earliest mention we have of Gwyn ap Nudd. He's also in a story called Culhwch ac Olwen, or How Culhwch won Olwen, it usually is if you buy a nice copy of The Mabinogion by Sioned Davies, the new classics, it'll be in the back called How Culhwch won Olwen. Gwyn ap Nudd is mentioned in that story as well. In this one, he's one of King Arthur's men.

He's quite a brute. He's a bit brutish and scary, and if I came across him in the street, I'd probably run away screaming because he is this really larger than life character who does these rather insane things. It's said that he could ride on a horse that can gallop over the seas, and he also gets into this weird fight where he ends up tearing someone's heart out and then feeding that heart to that person's child. So he's a bit of a brute in that one, but there's a lot of mystery involved under who he is in that story. Another implication towards Gwyn and his magical qualities we get in Culhwch ac Olwen is that it's said that Gwyn has all the powers of all the beings of Annwfn within him. And this kind of thing I think latched onto the idea of Gwyn in general because the idea that he has within him all the powers of the beings of Annwfn, as I mentioned earlier, the very deep, the Otherworld, this idea that he has the powers of all the beings that come from the Otherworld.

So he must be otherworldly himself and a ruler, right? So within the folkloric tradition, he then transformed into the king of fairy. He became this king of fairy, and he transformed from this like brutish, nightly figure who was ripping people's hearts out to this flamboyant kind of man sat on a golden throne trying to entice people to come and join him. So he became this flamboyant fairy like figure. And then later within the bardic tradition, he became a muse for the bards as well. And the bards would often compare the Welsh landscape to Gwyn ap Nudd. They would call the landscape things like tirwedd Gwyn, the landscape of Gwyn. So he was associated with the natural world. So that's where we get tylwyth Gwyn from, from tylwyth teg as well. So tylwyth Gwyn is the older term, but then tylwyth teg became a term that became more acceptable and might have been part of common vernacular before the Dafydd ap Gwilym apocryphal poem.

But this is the first instance we get of writing of a terminology for fairies, which is tylwyth Gwyn in the 14th century. But just because... Oh my gosh, I forgot this was in here. So this is a 14th century invocation to Gwyn ap Nudd. So this is an invocation that was recorded in a Latin manuscript called the Speculum Christiani, which was essentially just Christian propaganda. It was this dude writing about Christianity and saying, "Stop doing paganism, you idiots." Essentially, he was saying to people, "We are a Christian nation now. You need to stop doing all these older pagan things." And one of the examples he uses of pagan traditions still being carried out in Wales is this, an invocation to the king of fairies. And he refers, look at the Latin as the king of the Eumenides or as well the kindly ones. So again, going back to why there's that Greek connection.

So it's said in that manuscript, and this was all written in Latin because though people spoke in Welsh, they usually wrote in Latin this early on in history. So it said in this manuscript that people would approach the edge of a forest and at the edge of a forest, they would've a burning torch in one hand and a piece of iron in the other hand. And they would raise those things up and they would say, "Gwyn ap Nudd qui es ultra in silvis pro amore concubine tue permittite nos venire domum." Now whether they said it in Latin or Welsh, I don't know. Like I said, writing was usually in Latin, but talking was usually Welsh. So there might have been a Welsh version of this, but this is how the writer recorded it, in Latin.

And it essentially translates to "Gwyn ap Nudd, ye who are yonder in the forests beyond, allow us entry into your forests in the name of your beautiful queen."

Now, I'm kind of paraphrasing translators because I don't speak Latin, but I do find it funny that concubine, or concubine, is almost always translated to queen. I would think it would be concubine, but for some reason people always translate it to queen. So it's an invocation that was delivered by normal ordinary people as they entered into forests asking him for permission. There's later evidence that it was also used to avert illness. So people used to say it before they went into a house where someone was sick because they believed that maybe Gwyn ap Nudd and his fairies caused the illness in the house. So they would say this invocation to get rid of the influence of the fairies. But again, this is a really interesting thing. This is a really cool insight into a part of the Welsh fairy faith or the fairy tradition that was going on at this time.

If it was so prevalent that this Christian person was like, "I have to record this so that you stop doing it." And I'm so grateful that people did that. Oh my gosh, so many Christians recorded things going, "Don't do this." And now as pagans we're like, "Okay, now we can do them." But this is something that I've incorporated into my own practice. I've created my own Welsh version of it, and I do it as I enter into forests before ritual and such. An invocation to the king of fairies carried out by Christian people in a predominantly Christian country, how pagan. So going back to the idea that the term tylwyth Gwyn and tylwyth teg didn't appear within writing until the 14th and 15th centuries, that doesn't necessarily mean however, that that's the oldest evidence we have of a fairy faith or tradition. Because if we look to the older texts of things like the Mabinogi, there are so many motifs within the Mabinogi that are clearly fairy in nature, and yet never are these characters called fairy.

The best example is Rhiannon. That might be quite difficult for some to understand within a pagan context because if you open any book by Llewellyn Worldwide or Weiser books nowadays that has an entry on Rhiannon, it will inevitably say that Rhiannon is the queen of the Otherworld. But if you actually read the original Welsh texts, never in the text does it specifically say Rhiannon o Annwfn, that Rhiannon's from Annwfn or anything like that. It's just implied. It's implications and little hints that we get in certain motifs. So she's never actually specifically said to be otherworldly or to be a fairy, but there are motifs. So for example, when the character called Pwyll who eventually marries her, of course goes into Annwfn, the Otherworld, the ladies of Annwfn are dressed in these golden brocade silks. And then when we finally see Rhiannon later on in the First Branch, she's riding on a white horse dressed in golden brocade silks, that same motif coming up again.

Some people have said that that's because she's the same character as the queen earlier on in the First Branch. I'm not sure how I feel about that, but it definitely is a motif that gives her that otherworldly feel even if we ignore all the other magical stuff she does after that. And there's a lot of it. So though we didn't have evidence of terminology to describe fairies within older, prior to the 14th century Welsh writing and such, mostly because the Welsh didn't like writing things down prior to like the ninth century, we do have evidence of this idea of the Otherworld persisting and this idea of these denizens of the Otherworld coming through.

So the big question that I often get asked whenever I talk about fairies is are they good or are they bad? Because within a lot of neo-paganism and modern spirituality, you kind of have this contrasting view. You have people over on this side who are saying, "Fairies are beings of light. They're basically the angels of the Earth. They will heal you, they will give you all sorts of healing wisdom. They are the spirits of the flowers and the trees and they're all good, and we must connect to them." And then you have the people over on this side going, "Don't mess with those things. Never." I think it's a huge disparity because I know people over on this side who class themselves as really serious occultists. They sit there



with their grimoires, their Stephen Skinner translations and such. And they sit there and they think, "Okay, I'm going to conjure up a demon, but a fairy? Too far."

So what are they? Are they good or are they bad? Well, maybe it's less complicated than that and it's less of a black and white dichotomy. The easy way that I answer this question usually is by asking, well, are humans good or bad? What are we? Are we good or are we evil? Because that's a very subjective question. It depends on the human, it depends on the interaction, it depends on the situation in general. And I say it's the same thing for fairies. They operate in a different kind of realm of existence to us, it seems. And they operate on different sets of morals and standards. That doesn't necessarily mean they're evil. And I've often described it as being, ask a cow if a human is evil, and they'll probably say yes if they've lived their life in a slaughterhouse. So it's kind of that situation going on.

Do we want to mess with them? Probably not. We don't want to mess with them and pee them off essentially. But at the same time, that doesn't mean that we can't interact with them at all. So that moves me on to the next section, which is fairies interacting with mortals. Now, I've already mentioned that humans have a bit of an obsession with mating with fairies. There's a lot of folk tales from Wales... Huh, that rhymes, folk tales from Wales. I like that. There's a lot of folk tales from Wales that describe these encounters with these fairy brides. The most famous of which being The Bride of Llyn y Fan Fach, the lake Llyn y Fan Fach, down in south of Wales, who comes out of the lake, marries a mortal after kind of giving him a hard time for a while, and the marriage itself has a taboo to it.

So there's something you can't do. And that taboo is usually broken. In the case of the Llyn y Fan Fach story, it's that he can't hit her more than three times. If he hits her three times, she's gone and he ends up hitting her three times. So she's gone and then she goes, and part of the story is that when they do marry, they get given all these riches, all these bounties, all these wonderful things. So in the case of Llyn y Fan Fach, the farmer who married the fairy ended up with all these amazing cattle who produced the best milk, the best cheese. So they ended up rich, and when he hit her for the third time, she left and she took all the cows with her. So all the wealth, the prosperity that built at Myddfai vanished with her. That's not the end of the story though, because she does, according to a local Myddfai legend, then go and teach her children the secrets of the plant world, and they become the legendary physicians of Myddfai, some of the most valued physicians throughout all of Welsh legend and lore.

So that's one way that humans and fairies interact with each other, is via these interspecies? Are they a different species? I don't know, interbeing interactions and marriages. So the other way is midwives. So according to Welsh lore, nobody really knows why. Fairies usually need a human present when they're giving birth, and usually they need a human midwife there to help with the baby. So often midwives would be whisked away from their villages to help a fairy family give birth, and then they'd be gifted and rewarded all this amazing gold. And sometimes they'd be asked to stay a little longer and they'd say something like... The baby, the child, they wouldn't know they were fairies at this point. They'd just think they were really weird people who could travel through the air really quickly. They would say, "The child needs some ointment on his eyes. Can you stay and do that for us? But don't touch your eyes."

Then inevitably she touches her eye and then she can see into the fairy world, she can see beyond the glimmers and enchantments of the fairies. And then eventually she's caught out by the fairies and she's knackered. So that's another way that mortals interact with fairies. And then we also have fairy travelers who would sometimes knock on the door asking for food. If you gave them food, they would bless you. If you didn't, they would curse you and all sorts of hell would break loose. So in general, normal ordinary people did not want to interact with fairies. Ordinary common folk wanted to avoid them as much as possible. So there's numerous folk magical techniques embedded into our culture that keep fairies away. Hanging horseshoes above the door in some nations, like the one we're in right now, England, I forgot we were here, they usually protect from things like witchcraft.

But in Wales, witchcraft wasn't as big of an issue. If you look at the history of witchcraft in Wales, what you'll find is that Wales compared to England, was virtually untouched by all the witch hunts and such that were happening. And so when they were worried about supernatural forces, they were less worried about witches influencing or harming them and more worried about fairies. So for example, if all the cattle in the field suddenly dropped dead, if you were in Surrey, you might turn around and say, "Ooh, it's Wendy the witch down the road." But if you are in Glamorgan, you might turn around and say, "Ooh, it's the fairies." So they would hang things like horseshoes or pieces of rowan, whether it's the rowan wood or the rowan berries above doorways and in thresholds of houses and such, in order to keep the fair folk away. They would also plant rowan trees in the garden.

There's a lovely book that was published in 1938 by a Welsh guy who was called Evan Isaac, I think, and it's called *Coelion Cymru*, beliefs of Wales. It's a lovely book, never been translated into English unfortunately, but it talks about how a lot of these older Welsh houses still have the rowan tree arches by the gateway to keep nasty things like fairies away. And then we also have gorse. So gorse is very specifically close to my heart as a ward away from the fairies because it's a specifically Anglesey thing according to various texts. So people in Anglesey used to barricade their windows and search with pieces of gorse because it was believed that the fairies could not penetrate a house where gorse was present because they hated the stuff. And to be fair, as someone who grew up in Anglesey where this stuff grows in abundance, I hate it too.

But on the other hand, whereas normal, common, ordinary folk avoided fairies as best as possible, that wasn't the case for magicians and magical practitioners in general. As magical practitioners, I'm assuming a lot of you are magical practitioners or pagans or as Kristoffer Hughes says, fully paid up members of the lunatic fringe. And we tend to delve into things that are a bit weird, don't we? So the things that ordinary people go, "Ooh, don't touch that. Don't touch that witchcraft nonsense, it's going to cause all sorts of harms to your life." We tend to go, "Yeet, I'm going in. This is a thing I love." So the same with fairies. Magicians and magical practitioners in general, they enjoyed the idea of communing and working with fairies. The basis for it though was that you needed to have a very deeply rooted knowledge of what the fairies were and how they operated.

The kind of... What's the word? I can't think of the English word. The benefits to working with fairies as a magician was that fairies were not limited by constraints like time and physicality. So though they are physical beings, for the most part, they are also set to be able to get away from physicality sometimes. And they are also not influenced by time in the same way that we are. They don't experience time in the same way. It's said that the easiest way to know that you're in a kind of fairy enchantment is that time moves differently around you. You notice that time is either extended or it's shortened. Time has either gone by in a flash or it feels like this is going on forever. So fairies and magicians are a big link in Wales, and we see it more commonly the association of magicians or witches with fairies than we do with things like demons and the devil as we see across the border.

So where witches or magicians might have made pacts with devils and demons in other places, in Wales it was more a case of, "Nope, they've made a deal with the fair folk in some capacity." Examples would be Harry Lloyd. Now, Harry Lloyd was a magician who claimed he could acquire riches from the fairies. So you'd go to him and you'd say, "I'm so dirt poor. Have a shilling, go give that to the fairies and tell them to make me rich. I need to do that." It was a bit of a con, but still part of our history. Anne Jones was another one. She would collect dew that gathered on the grass in the month of May. And she said that she went and visited the fairies on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and they would bless the water and this water would then act as a healing water. And then my favorite one is in the...

Well, actually in the Library of Wales back in the eighties, there was this manuscript, this book, this grimoire essentially, that belonged to a magician that lived in Denbighshire, and it became known as the

mystical or secret book of the cunning man from Denbighshire. And in this book, he recounted a method of conjuring and communicating with, as he calls them, the spirits we call the tylwyth teg. So it's a conjuring technique which doesn't conjure spirits of the dead, but instead fairies. And he describes how you give them offerings of whole roasted chicken. And honestly, that would work on me too if you offered me a whole chicken, I'd do anything for you. But this book went missing. So obviously the fairies didn't want us to know anything because there's a lovely academic called Kate Bosse-Griffiths, who was a German lady who moved over to Wales, learned the Welsh language and became a Welsh academic.

She went through this entire manuscript and wrote an entire book called *Byd y Dyn Hysbys*, which is another book, never been translated into English. All about this book, this manuscript, which delved into a Welsh method of communing with fairies in a ceremonial magical context. And she transcribed it, she took it home, she made notes with it. And then in about the nineties and the early two thousands, people thought, "Ooh, I want to look at that. I want to look at this manuscript." And it's gone. It's just not there anymore. It's vanished from Aberystwyth. Just vanished entirely. So if you're ever in like a secondhand bookshop and you see a really weird manuscript of weird scribbles in Welsh, let me know.

So I don't have much time to go over anything else that I talked about today. So I'll just leave you with this conclusion. So fairies are enchanting beings that are very much liminal in nature. Can they do bad? Yes, they can blind you. They can eat you. They can do all sorts of terrible things to you if you offend them. If you don't give them food and drink when they knock on your door disguised as travelers, they will curse you tremendously. And even then, if you give them food and drink, sometimes they'll say, "Well, this food wasn't good enough, so screw you, I'm going to curse you anyway." So yes, they can cause bad to us, and most ordinary common people avoided them in the same way that most common ordinary people today avoid witchcraft. But there were some people, the magicians, the magical specialists who studied them, who tried to understand them, who connected to them on a deep level.

Now, whether or not these people saw them as spirits is up for debate. Now that's a question I will leave for you today. Are fairies spirits? Because we have that one evidence of that manuscript that comes from around 16th or 17th century Wales, which describes the fairies as spirits that we call the tylwyth teg. And they're obviously not limited by corporality or physicality. And yet there are other Welsh writers like Hugh Evans for example, off the top of my head, who wrote a book titled *Y Tylwyth Teg*. It's this gorgeous book which has all these beautiful illustrations in it. And he wrote in that book that he despises the idea that people keep calling the tylwyth teg spirits. That he grew up immersed in Welsh folk tradition, and the tylwyth teg are not spirits.

They're as real as you and me. They can touch you, they can feel you. They are not spirits. And then there are others who say there's something in between, not quite spirit, not quite not spirit either. So are the tylwyth teg fairy spirits? I'll leave you to that to ponder. So they can cause harms and all manners of ills to us, but they can also be potent and powerful magical allies to the magicians or the magical specialists who knows what they're doing. And interwoven into Welsh tradition and various other British traditions, we have this idea that magical practitioners have connected to fairies for absolute centuries. So this very modern idea of either they are all good, amazing light beings who heal you with the virtuous ray of Reiki or whatever and also the idea that they're completely evil and we should stay away from them are two extremes.

And I like to think that we should be somewhere more in the middle as magical practitioners. We should be cautious of them while also forging relationships with them. And with that, thank you so much for listening. I hope you enjoyed this talk. If you'd like to learn more, I do have a book called *Welsh Witchcraft: A Guide to the Spirits, Lore, and Magic of Wales*, published by Llewellyn Worldwide over in America. There's an entire chapter in this one on fairies, but I do have another book coming out next year, all about specifically Welsh fairy beliefs and traditions. So keep an eye out for that as well. And like

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I said, I'm like a rash. Now that you've rubbed against me, you are infected. So come find me on the TikTok, and the YouTube, and the Facebook, and the Instagram, and all those things. And if you have any more questions, do feel free to let me know. Thank you so much.