The Morrígan: Phantom Queen of Celtic Mythology

Jacqueline Garcia
Chapman University, jacqugarcia@chapman.edu

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The Morrígan & Cú Chulainn

The Morrígan appeared to the hero Cú Chulainn and offered her love to him. When he failed to recognize her and rejected her, the Morrígan told him that she would hinder him when he was in battle. When Cú Chulainn was eventually killed, she settled on his shoulder in the form of a crow. Cú Chulainn’s misfortune was that he never recognized the feminine power of sovereignty that she offered him. The Morrígan appeared to him on 4 separate occasions and each time he failed to recognize her. She first appeared when she declared her love for him. After he had wounded her, she appeared to him as an old hag and he offered his blessings to her, ultimately healing her. On his way to his final battle, Cú Chulainn saw the Washer at the Ford, who declared that she was “washing the clothes and arms of Cú Chulainn, who would soon be dead”. Lastly, the Morrígan appeared to him as three hags (the triple aspect of the Morrígan) to break a taboo of eating dog flesh.

The Morrígan in Pop Culture

The Morrígan has made a variety of appearances among popular media. In *The Wicked + The Divine*, she appeared as one of the gods manifesting in the modern era, portrayed as both a single entity and three separate individuals, each with their own names and distinct personalities. In the Marvel Comics, she appears as a powerful goddess in the Celtic pantheon who is later revealed to be a position that several women have held throughout history. She has also made appearances in games such as *Smite*, the *Darkstalkers* series, and the *Dragon Age* series. Many songs have made references to her, such as the song by Primordial called “Songs of the Morrígan”.

The Morrígan vs Thanatos

In Celtic Mythology, the Morrígan was seen as the embodiment of death. As a raven or crow, she would appear on the battlefield and carry away the dead. As the prophetess Neiman, her furious shriek and battle cry mean that death would soon follow. She intimated, panicked, and confused soldiers on the battlefield into dying of fright or mistaking their own comrades for enemies. While the Morrígan represented more violent deaths, the Greek deity, Thanatos, was quite the opposite. This figure was the Greek god of nonviolent deaths. Thanatos’ touch of death was gentle, often compared to that of his brother Hypnos, the god of sleep. While the Morrígan was one of the most prominent figures in Celtic mythology, Thanatos was seen as more of a minor deity, and oftentimes depicted as a personified spirit of death rather than a god.

The Morrígan vs Athena

The Morrígan’s main portrayal in Celtic mythology is her role as the goddess of war. The Morrígan’s approach to war was closely linked to her role as the goddess of death. She determines whether or not you walk off the field of battle or are carried off upon your shield. Oftentimes, she is also seen helping those whom she favors in battles with her sovereign powers. Athena, the Greek goddess of war, approaches battle in a more strategic fashion, due to her additional role as the goddess of wisdom. She is known for her appearance as a companion of heroes and is oftentimes shown as fierce and ruthless. Both goddesses were feared by men, but embodied the act of war in different manners.